

July 14, 1999

SUBJECT: Merit Promotion Plan

TO: All Rural Development Employees

This memorandum transmits the new Merit Promotion Plan for Rural Development employees including the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the Rural Housing Service, and the Rural Utilities Service. It is also intended to cover positions assigned to the new Support Services Bureau.

This policy is effective July 12, 1999, for non-bargaining unit employees. Before implementing or applying this policy to bargaining unit positions, negotiations with the appropriate union local must be completed.

This is the second Service Center agency common policy issuance. The plan is being issued in its present format pending implementation of a uniform directives system. The plan is available from the Internet at:

<http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/hrd/cover.html>

Human Resources is planning to hold a teleconference in August with Administrative Officers and State Human Resource Managers to review the plan and answer questions regarding significant differences from present policy. A Question/Answer presentation is currently being developed for this policy and will appear on the website shortly.

Questions regarding this memorandum or the policy may be directed to your State Administrative Programs Staff, Human Resource Manager or to the Human Resources headquarters staff.

LEONARD HARDY, JR.
Deputy Administrator
for Operations and Management

Attachment

EXPIRATION DATE:
Until Superseded

FILING INSTRUCTIONS
Administrative/Other Programs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MERIT PROMOTION PLAN

	Paragraph	Page
Background	1	1
Policy	2	1
Objectives	3	1
Coverage	4	2
Exceptions	5	3
Methods for Filling Vacancies	6	4
Priority Placement Programs	7	4
Initiating the Vacancy	8	5
Procedures When Vacancy is Announced	9	6
Submitting Applications	10	7
Evaluation to Determine Eligibility, Basic Qualifications, and Notification to Candidates	11	8
Rating and Ranking Procedures	12	9
Alternative Evaluation Method	13	12
Selection Process	14	12
Promotion Records and Information	15	13
Program Review	16	14

ATTACHMENTS:

Employee, Supervisor and Human Resources Responsibilities

1. BACKGROUND

This establishes the procedures for merit promotion and placement actions for positions in the National Offices, Service Centers, and other Field Offices of the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Rural Housing Service, and Rural Utilities Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, (NRCS), Risk Management Agency, (RMA), Foreign Agricultural Service, (FAS), Farm Service Agency, (FSA), and the Support Services Bureau, (SSB). This document is in accordance with 5 CFR 335 and provides supplemental information to comply with these requirements.

2. POLICY

- A. In order to promote fair and equitable treatment for all employees, this plan defines how consideration will be given to all interested applicants.
- B. This Supplement does not guarantee promotion; nor does it require a vacancy be filled by promotion.
- C. Actions under this Merit Promotion Plan--whether in identification, qualification, evaluation, or selection of candidates, or any other phase of the promotion process--shall be made without discrimination for any nonmerit reason.
- D. This plan covers promotions in the competitive service through GS-15 and similar pay schedules, and to or from any prevailing rate schedule position.
- E. Any exception to this merit promotion policy must be approved by the head of the national Human Resources Office.

3. OBJECTIVES

- A. The objectives of this plan are to:
 - narrow the number of candidates to a reasonable number and assure that selections are made from among the best qualified applicants;
 - give employees an opportunity to receive fair, equitable, and appropriate consideration for higher level jobs;
 - provide an incentive for employees to improve their performance and develop their knowledges, skills, and abilities, (KSAs);
 - provide career opportunities for employees;
 - bring the best qualified candidates to the attention of the selecting official; and,
 - enhance and support diversity in the workforce.

4. COVERAGE

The following types of personnel actions are covered:

- A. Competitive promotion.
- B. Reassignment or demotion to a position with more promotion potential than the highest actual grade held by an employee on a permanent basis under a career or career-conditional appointment.
- C. Transfers to a higher-graded position or a position higher promotion potential than the highest actual grade previously held by an employee on a permanent basis under a career or career-conditional appointment.
- D. Reinstatement to a higher-graded position or a position with higher promotion potential than the highest actual grade held by an employee on a permanent basis under a career or career-conditional appointment.
- E. Selections for details for more than 120 days to a higher-graded position or to a position with known promotion potential.
- F. Selection for training that is any one of the following:
 - Part of an authorized training agreement.
 - Part of a promotion program, although the promotion may not immediately follow the training.
 - Required before an employee is qualified for reassignment to a different occupational series.
 - Part of a Career Enhancement Program.
 - Designed primarily to prepare employees for advancement or to fulfill specific qualification requirements for a position with known promotion potential.
- G. Time limited promotion for more than 120 days to a higher-graded position or a position with higher promotion potential, unless the selectee has held the grade previously on a permanent basis.

5. EXCEPTIONS

The following types of personnel actions are not covered:

- A. Competitive selection from an Office of Personnel Management (OPM) certificate or a certificate issued by an Agency with delegated examining authority.
- B. Promotions resulting from an employee's position being reclassified at a higher grade because of accretion of duties and responsibilities.
- C. Promotions resulting from upgrading a position, without significant changes in the duties or responsibilities, because of either the issuance of a new classification standard or the correction of an initial classification error.
- D. Career-ladder promotions when an employee was previously selected for an assignment intended to prepare him/her for the position being filled. Sources of selection may be:
 - an Office of Personnel Management certificate
 - a list of employees issued under delegated examining authority
 - selection under competitive promotion procedures
 - Special Placement Programs or
 - any other direct hire authority.
- E. Promotion, reassignment, demotion, transfer, reinstatement, or detail to a position having promotion potential no greater than the potential of a position an employee currently holds or previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service, provided the employee was not demoted or separated from that grade because of deficiencies in performance or "for cause" reasons.
- F. Details, not longer than 120 days, to a higher-graded position or to a position with no known promotion potential.
- G. Details at the same or lower grade.
- H. Actions taken as a remedy for failure to receive proper consideration in a competitive promotion action.
- I. Promoting an employee upon exercise of reemployment rights if the employee's former position was reclassified during his/her absence.

- J. Selection of a candidate from the Reemployment Priority List (RPL) for a position up to the highest grade previously held in the competitive service.
- K. Position changes permitted by Reduction-in-Force (RIF) regulations.
- L. Repromotion to a grade or position from which an employee was demoted as a result of RIF.
- M. Selection by reassignment to a position with the same or less promotion potential than a position previously held under a career or career-conditional appointment.
- N. A temporary promotion for 120 days or less to a higher-graded position or to a position with known promotion potential.
- O. Permanent promotion to a position held under temporary promotion when:
 - (1) the assignment was originally made under competitive procedures; and
 - (2) it was made known under competitive procedures to all competitors at the time that it might lead to a permanent promotion.
- P. Voluntary change to a lower grade with the same or less promotion potential than previously held under a career or career-conditional appointment.
- Q. A position change from a position having known promotion potential to a position at the same grade having no higher potential.
- R. Selection of an eligible CTAP or ICTAP candidate.

6. METHODS FOR FILLING VACANCIES

Vacancies may be filled by any appropriate method including special placement programs, new appointment, reassignment, transfer, reinstatement or promotion, etc.

7. PRIORITY PLACEMENT PROGRAMS

- A. When a position is announced with an area of consideration limited to all or some portion of the USDA workforce, the order of consideration for priority and other candidates is as follows:
 - 1. Agency CTAP eligibles
 - 2. USDA CTAP eligibles
 - 3. Agency/USDA repromotion eligibles

4. Agency priority consideration eligibles
5. All other applicants within the area of consideration, and
6. RPL registrants at the option of the selecting official.

B. When a position is announced with an area of consideration which exceeds the current USDA workforce (e.g., Government-wide or all sources), the order of consideration for priority and other candidates is as follows:

1. Agency CTAP eligibles
2. USDA CTAP eligibles
3. USDA RPL registrants
4. USDA ICTAP applicants
5. Agency/USDA repromotion eligibles
6. Agency priority consideration eligibles
7. ICTAP eligibles (other than those displaced from USDA) and
8. All other applicants.

C. USDA REPROMOTION PLACEMENT PLAN

Employees downgraded through no fault of their own are entitled to priority consideration for a period of 2 years from the effective date of the employee's downgrade.

D. PRIORITY CONSIDERATION

Employees are entitled to priority consideration whenever reconstruction of a promotion action shows that, except for some error, (i.e. wrong qualification determination, failure to consider, improper rating, failure to follow competitive procedures, etc.), the employee would have appeared on a promotion certificate. The employee shall be entitled to one bonafide consideration for the type (same series, grade, up to the same promotion potential, and geographic area) of position previously applied for under competitive procedures. A priority consideration certificate will be forwarded to the selecting official prior to issuing a competitive certificate. If no priority consideration candidate is selected, the selecting official must provide job-related justification for the non-selection.

8. INITIATING THE VACANCY

- A. The supervisor of the vacancy will submit an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, through appropriate channels. With the SF-52, the supervisor will attach a Position Description Cover Sheet and a current position description that accurately describes the position to be filled.
- B. No action will be taken to staff the vacant position until the position is classified.
- C. The selecting official will determine, in consultation with the Personnel Specialist, the best way to fill the vacancy (OPM register, transfer, reinstatement, merit promotion procedures, Special Placement Programs, etc.).

9. PROCEDURES WHEN VACANCY IS ANNOUNCED

The following procedure will be followed for all merit promotion vacancies:

A. Identification of Selection Criteria.

- 1. Prior to posting the vacancy announcement, the Personnel Specialist determines:
 - a. That KSAs are established for the position. The Personnel Specialist will discuss and review with the selecting official the existing KSAs to determine if they are still appropriate; or
 - b. That KSAs are not established for the position. The Personnel Specialist will contact the selecting official to establish the KSA's.

B. Minimum Area of Consideration

The following is designated as the minimum area of consideration:

- 1. Any single Agency, Service, or Bureau, National/Headquarters Offices -commuting area
- 2. Any single Agency, Service, or Bureau, State/Field Offices - commuting area

A wider area of consideration may be initially established to obtain more qualified candidates if it is anticipated that sufficient candidates will not be available.

C. Preparation and posting vacancy announcements.

1. Vacancy announcements will normally be posted for a minimum of 10 workdays. Announcements with the area of consideration limited to CTAP/ICTAP candidates may be open for 5 calendar days.
2. Nationwide/Government wide will be posted for a minimum of 21 calendar days.
3. Close of business in Field Offices will be determined by the appropriate official in each office.
4. Vacancies will be posted on the automated bulletin board systems prescribed by OPM. Offices will ensure announcements are posted to provide for adequate publicity to employees.

10. SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS

A. To be considered for posted vacancies, the following procedures must be followed:

1. Applicants must submit:
 - SF-171, Application for Federal Employment; or OF-612, Optional Application for Federal Employment; or
resume; and
 - Supplemental statement that addresses each of the KSAs separately or other information included in the announcement; and
 - Current performance appraisal/rating, or a statement advising the performance appraisal/rating is unavailable. (This applies only to current Federal Employees).
 - Any other information as specified in the vacancy announcement.
2. Non-competitive referral candidates are not required to submit KSA supplemental statements although they are encouraged to do so.

NOTE:

- Failure on the part of the applicant to submit the requested material will result in not being considered for the advertised position.
- KSA supplemental statements may not be more than 2 single-spaced pages per KSA unless otherwise stated on the vacancy announcement.
- Additional materials, such as copies of position descriptions, publications, award certificates, will not be considered in the ranking process.

- B. Applications must be received at the specified location by the close of business on the closing date of the vacancy announcement unless otherwise stated on the vacancy announcement. Exceptions to this requirement may be made by the servicing Human Resources Office for reasons such as extended power outages, severe weather, etc.
 - C. Applications submitted by facsimile or other electronic means as specified in the announcement will be accepted.
 - D. Employees who are on extended leave are responsible for notifying their supervisor if they want to be considered for promotional opportunities while they are on travel or leave. Employees shall leave a telephone number, e-mail address and/or facsimile number with their supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for contacting the employee to provide vacancy information.
 - E. Voluntary applications within the Agency will not be accepted unless so stated on the vacancy announcement. The vacancy announcement will outline the method of considering candidates when applications are accepted.
 - F. Applications will be accepted from candidates under special hiring authorities, i.e., VRA, 30% Disabled Veteran, Persons with Disabilities, etc. Qualified candidates will be placed on the Promotion Certificate as non-competitive referrals.
 - G. Section 765 of P.L. 05-277 states that permanent employees of FSA County Committees employed on or after October 1, 1998, shall be considered as having Federal Civil Service status for the purpose of applying for USDA Civil Service vacancies. Applications will be accepted from permanent FSA County Committee employees who are employed on or after October 1, 1998, when the area of consideration includes FSA employees. FSA County Committee Employees do not receive any priority consideration for Civil Service vacancies.
11. EVALUATION TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY, BASIC QUALIFICATIONS, AND NOTIFICATION TO CANDIDATES
- A. Qualifications of the applicants will be determined from the application package submitted and the applicant notified of the results.
 - B. Minimum qualification standards used for placements are standards approved by the Office of Personnel Management and may be found in OPM Handbook, Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions and the X-118C, Internal Qualifications Guide for Trade and Labor Jobs. The Personnel Specialist will assure that all of the following requirements are met:

1. Time-in-grade restrictions.
 2. Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions or the X-118C standards.
 3. 90-day after competitive appointment restriction.
 4. Any other requirements such as selective placement factors (e.g., ability to communicate in a foreign language).
 5. Summary performance rating of fully successful or results achieved.
- C. Applicants must meet all of the above requirements by the closing date of the announcement.
- D. Submission of additional information after the closing date will not be accepted.

12. RATING AND RANKING PROCEDURES

Either a Merit Promotion Panel or a Personnel Specialist/Subject Matter Expert may be used to rate and rank candidates.

A panel may be used for any vacancy regardless of the number of competitive candidates.

A Personnel Specialist/Subject Matter Expert may be used if there are 10 or less competitive candidates for any particular advertised grade level.

The same method will be used for any position(s) advertised at multiple grade levels.

A. Merit Promotion Panel Method

1. Merit Promotion Panel Composition

- a. The Personnel Specialist will assemble a Merit Promotion panel consisting of at least two members who occupy positions at a grade level not lower than the full performance level of the position being filled. The selecting official may recommend members to serve on the panel subject to the approval of the Personnel Specialist.
- b. The Personnel Specialist will serve as a facilitator with responsibility for assuring the requirements of merit promotion procedures are followed and to assist in expediting the process.

- c. Neither the supervisor, the selecting official, nor the approving official of the vacancy may be a member of the panel. They may, however, be asked to appear before the panel to answer any questions regarding the vacancy or the crediting plan.
- d. Merit Promotion Panels should include minority group members and/or women.
- e. Members of the panel will protect the confidentiality of all information received or reviewed during the committee process.
- f. There may be an EEO observer present during this process.

2. Merit Promotion Panel Delegated Responsibility

The Merit Promotion Panel has the final responsibility for determining best qualified candidates based on valid, job-related criteria and employee's application package. They are accountable for defending their final decision to any regulatory or investigative agency.

3. Merit Promotion Panel's Rating of the Candidates

- a. The Merit Promotion Panel will use the following rating instruments to determine a candidate's possession of each identified KSA and the level of proficiency attained.
 - Rating Instrument - application, KSAs, performance appraisal, related awards, training and self development.

NOTE: These factors may be considered in the evaluation process only to the extent that they are clearly related to one or more of the skills and knowledges important to successful performance in the job to be filled.

- b. A rating scale will be developed for each KSA against which an applicant's possession of that KSA will be measured.
The point range is 5 - 0.

Superior assigned)	- (5 points will be
Satisfactory assigned)	- (3 points will be
Minimally acceptable assigned)	- (1 point will be
No evidence assigned)	- (0 point will be

B. Personnel Specialist/Subject Matter Expert Ranking Method

1. If there are 10 or fewer qualified competitive applicants at each particular grade level for a vacancy, a Personnel Specialist may be used to determine the best qualified.
2. The Personnel Specialist or a subject matter expert will apply the same rating criteria used by a merit promotion panel as described above in paragraph 12.A.3.

C. Determining the Best Qualified

1. Each basically qualified competitive candidate is evaluated against criteria developed from the job analysis process which was developed prior to rating. Each candidate is given a score based on their experience, education, related awards, training, and self development. These scores are then combined and recorded on the master score sheet.
2. Up to 10 candidates may be certified for each grade level if meaningful distinctions cannot be made among a smaller number.
3. Where distinctions simply cannot be made, if a tie occurs for the 10th position, all names with that score will be referred.
4. If more than 1 position is to be filled, three additional names may be certified for each additional vacancy.
5. If insufficient candidates, (three or less) are best qualified, the selecting official may make a selection or request that the area of consideration be extended.
6. There is no provision allowing the selecting official to request and make a selection from candidates who have not been rated best qualified.

13. Alternative Evaluation Method

1. This is an alternate approach for determining well qualified candidates when 10 or fewer applications are received from basically qualified candidates who must compete.
2. The Personnel Specialist reviews application materials to determine that an applicant meets basic qualifications and any selective factors identified for the position. A further review is conducted to distinguish well qualified candidates from those who only meet minimum requirements.

3. If a Personnel Specialist is not familiar with the requirements of the position to determine whether experience, education, or training relates to the evaluation criteria, then a subject matter expert may perform the evaluation or his/her technical advice may be obtained.
4. Applicants who meet all these requirements are referred to the selecting official as well qualified candidates for consideration by the selecting official.
5. Any basically qualified candidates for lateral reassignment and those eligible for consideration under special hiring authorities or for reinstatement will be referred to the selecting official without being evaluated by any of these methods.

14. SELECTION PROCESS

- A. The names of the best qualified candidates will be listed on the Promotion Certificate by grade level in alphabetical order.
- B. The selecting official may be provided with all Best Qualified candidates' KSA supplemental statements, applications and any other related material.
- C. The selecting official has the option to either interview or not to interview the best qualified candidates on a promotion certificate. If one best qualified candidate is interviewed, then all best qualified candidates must be interviewed. Non-competitive referrals need not be interviewed, nor must the selecting official interview all non-competitive referrals if they interview one.
- D. The selecting official is entitled to make a selection from any of the candidates listed on a promotion certificate based on his/her judgment of how well the candidate will perform in the particular job being filled.
- E. The selecting official will make his/her selection, forward it through appropriate approving officials. Each candidate will be notified of the selection.
- F. The promotion certificate should be returned within 30 days. If the selecting official is unable to make the selection, extensions may be granted up to 90 days from the date the certificate was originally issued. In the event a like (same Agency, official title, series, grade, and geographic location) vacancy occurs within the original area of consideration during the 90 day period, the same certificate may be used to fill the subsequent vacancy(s) without re-advertising.
- G. The selecting official is not required to make a selection from the promotion certificate but may select from any other appropriate source.

- H. A selected candidate will normally be released to enter on duty in the new position no later than 1 full pay period after selection. Extensions beyond the normal 1 pay period will be negotiated between the supervisors involved by the Personnel Specialist.

15. PROMOTION RECORDS AND INFORMATION

- A. The Human Resources office will establish and maintain an official promotion case file for 2 years.
- B. The following information will be provided to any employee upon request:
 - 1. Explanations and supporting regulations concerning the Merit Promotion Plan.
 - 2. The qualifications required for a position.
 - 3. If the employee was considered and basically qualified.
 - 4. Whether the employee was among the best qualified and how the employee was evaluated by the Merit Promotion Panel or Personnel Specialist.
 - 5. Cut-off score for best qualified.
 - 6. Scores of other candidates (not identified by name).
 - 7. Number of qualified candidates.
 - 8. Number of candidates certified as Best Qualified.
 - 9. Who was selected.
- C. Employee Complaints: An employee has the right to file a grievance or complaint if he or she feels:
 - 1. There has been an improper application of governing rules and regulations.
 - 2. The Merit Promotion Plan procedures were not followed.

Individual judgments used in merit promotion process or non-selection from a group of properly ranked or certified candidates are not subject to the formal administrative grievance process.
- D. All employees are encouraged to discuss plans and opportunities for advancement with their supervisor and request information and/or assistance from the servicing office on specifics of the Merit Promotion Plan, qualification standards, etc.

16. PROGRAM REVIEW

This plan will be reviewed and reported on periodically in conjunction with managers, supervisors and employees to ensure that:

- A. The plan is effective and useful to employees and management;
- B. Promotion actions and employee complaints are handled promptly and properly;
- C. Promotions are used to encourage competent employees to investigate new careers and to make the best use of their knowledge and skills; and
- D. Employees, supervisors and managers have a full understanding of the merit promotion process.

ATTACHMENT 1

EMPLOYEE, SUPERVISOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES RESPONSIBILITIES

Employee Responsibility:

1. Review announcements under the Merit Promotion Program.
2. Review announcements and, if they feel they meet specific experience and training requirements for the position, properly complete and forward all required application material by the closing date for each position for which they wish to be considered, keeping in mind that the Promotion Certificate can be used for another like (same Agency, official title, series, grade, and geographic location) vacancy that occurs within 90 calendar days.
3. Keep supervisors informed of career interests. Before departure on temporary duty, scheduled leave, and other absences, provide supervisor with a telephone number, e-mail address and/or facsimile number at which they may be contacted.
4. Take advantage of self-development and training opportunities, both on and off the job.
5. Demonstrate competence and readiness for advancement by diligent and effective performance in current assignment.
6. When requested, participate in applying OPM regulations to establish reasonable job-related evaluation criteria (KSAs), and participate on promotion panels for determining best qualified candidates.
7. Assure that official personnel records reflect all experience, education and training.
8. Keep informed of the provisions of this Plan.

Supervisor Responsibility:

1. Maintain a current copy of this plan, make it available to their employees, and exert every effort to ensure that employees fully understand the plan.
2. Inform new employees where position vacancy announcements are posted.
3. Periodically inform employees, either orally or in writing, that questions about the Plan or specific promotion actions should be referred to the servicing Personnel office for informal handling; that formal means for resolving promotion complaints are available through Agency Grievance Procedures.

4. Anticipate personnel vacancies and initiate action in a timely manner so that sufficient qualified applicants can be found to facilitate the best selection.
5. Participate in applying OPM regulations to establish reasonable job-related evaluation criteria (KSAs).
6. Participate in or make employees available for rating panels.
7. Give fair, equitable, and full consideration to all candidates referred and make a final selection from the list without discrimination for any nonmerit reason and without favoritism based on personal relationship or patronage.
8. Under the provisions of this plan, release a selected employee for assignment to his or her new job.
9. On a fair and equitable basis, guide and assist employees in developing skills and abilities through cross-training, special assignments, and formal education, as needed. Encourage and advise employees regarding self-development needs and opportunities, and on areas where improvement should be made to increase chances for future promotion.

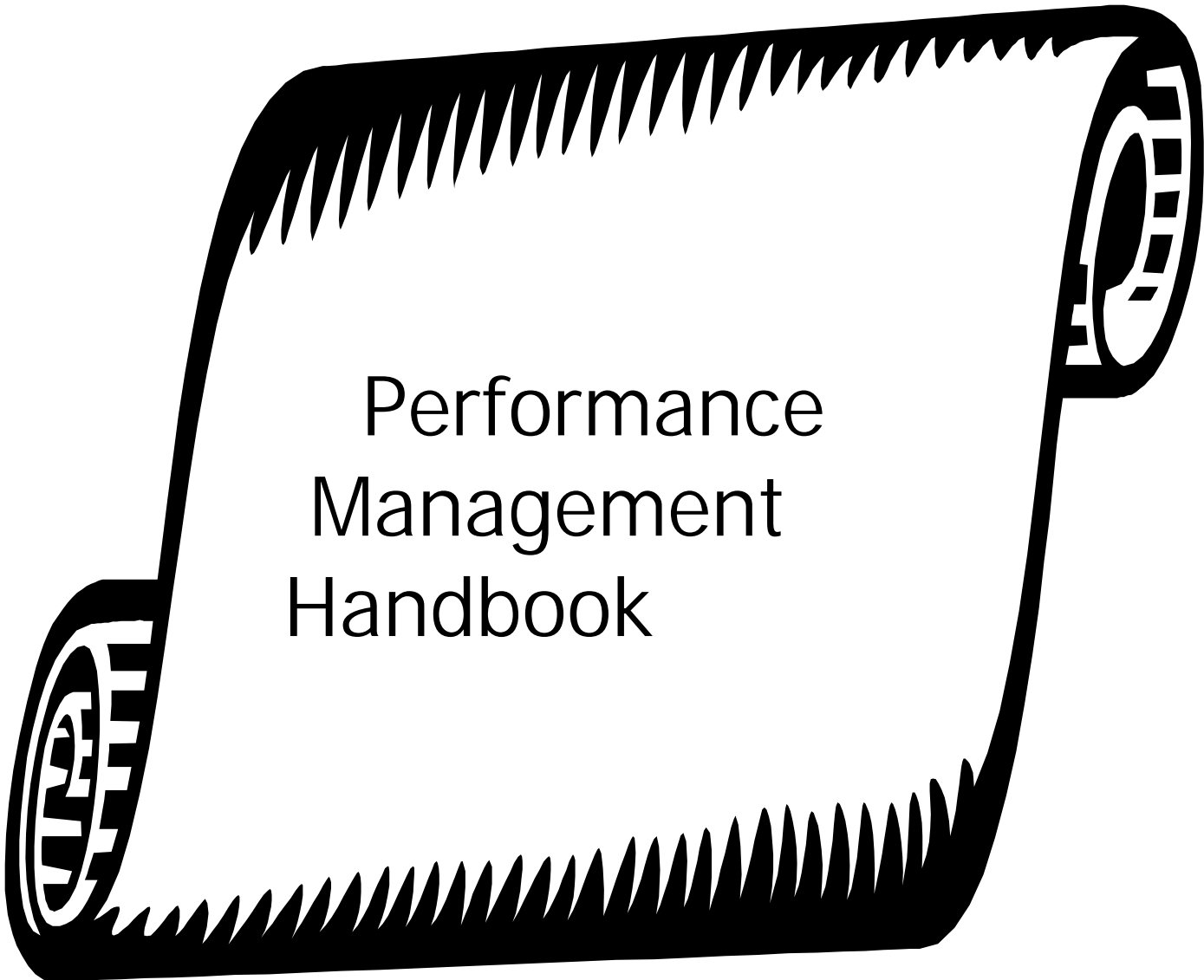
Human Resources Responsibility:

1. Develop and administer the Merit Promotion Plan.
2. Ensure the quality and effectiveness of the merit promotion program and management/employee understanding and acceptance.
3. Through job-analysis, develop and administer selective placement factors for basic eligibility and identification of job-related criteria.
4. Determine and/or develop appropriate evaluation methods and instruments to be included in crediting plans.
5. Provide technical advice and assistance to panel members responsible for rating candidates.
6. Publicize the program to keep management and employees well informed.
7. Furnish advice and assistance to employees interested in advancing or transferring to new career fields.
8. Evaluate program effectiveness to include initiation of improvements or necessary changes.
9. Maintain records in accordance with OPM and USDA requirements.

10. Give new employees general information on the program as a part of employee orientation.
11. Advise of methods and procedures for filling all vacancies.
12. Advise candidates who apply for promotion whether they meet basic eligibility requirements and inform them of action taken on their applications.
13. Ensure that position vacancy announcements are published.



USDA Service Center Agencies
Farm Service Agency
Natural Resources Conservation
Service
Rural Development

A large, stylized black frame resembling a tractor's body, with two wheels visible on the left and right sides. The frame is open at the top and bottom, creating a large rectangular space for the title. The wheels have a simple, geometric design with spokes.

Performance Management Handbook

[Supplement to SSBD 4140-01]

Forward

This handbook is intended for employees, supervisors, and managers of the Service Center Agencies: Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Housing Service, Rural Business Cooperative Service, and Rural Utilities Service. Most of the materials in this handbook are taken from the performance management program policy published in Support Services Bureau Directive (SSBD) 4140-01. It should be considered a supplement to, not a substitute for, the performance management program policy.

The 8-step method discussed in Appendices B and C was developed by staff of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for use in interagency training sessions. The Department of Veterans Administration (VA) saw this as an easy-to-use method and found that it was applicable to many different operational environments. Material in Appendix D concerning the use of additional performance elements was obtained from OPM. The handbook was compiled and edited by the administrative convergence workteam on performance management and employee recognition.

Team Members:

Kelly Broadway, Employee Relations Specialist, Farm Service Agency,
Kansas City Management Office
Becky Cash, Personnel Management Specialist, Rural Development, St.
Louis Field Services Branch
Bill Dallas, Vice President, American Federation of Government
Employees, Local 3354, St. Louis, MO
Mitch Holder, Administrative Team Leader, Natural Resources Conservation
Service, Arizona State Office
Kelli Mollison, Human Resources Officer, Natural Resources Conservation
Service, Washington State Office
Julie Wilson, Human Resources Manager, Rural Development, Illinois
State Office

Readers should find the format of this handbook easy to follow and the material should be self-explanatory. We hope that you find this handbook helpful in your performance management activities.

Table of Contents

Topic	Page
The Guiding Principles of Performance Management	4
Introduction to Performance Management	5
General Information	5
Responsibilities	5
Guidance and Procedures	7
Developing Performance Plans	7
Monitoring and Appraising Performance	10
Linkage to Other Actions	14

Appendices

Appendix A:	SCA Form 4140, Performance Work Plan
Appendix B:	Quick Reference for Developing Employee Performance Plans that Link to Organizational Goals
Appendix C:	Developing Performance Plans
Appendix D:	The Additional Element
Appendix E:	Opportunity to Improve

The Guiding Principles of Performance Management

- **Provide a program for ongoing communication between employee and supervisor** by focusing on feedback and employee development rather than on the rating.
- **Reduce paperwork** by providing standardized core elements.
- **Provide flexibility** by allowing for unique, job specific performance elements.
- **Provide a local option to implement additional elements** for developmental purposes, measuring team/group performance, and accomplishment of organizational goals. These will not be used in the employee's overall rating.
- **Foster "Team USDA"** by supporting and defining service center concepts and cooperative efforts and encouraging the use of an element that rates individual contributions to the team.
- **Provide a program that focuses on results,** organizational goals, and strategic plans,
- **Provide a program that is technically strong,** and defensible before third parties and meets all legal and regulatory requirements.
- **Place more emphasis on accomplishments,** not ratings, in the awards process.
- **Encourage employee involvement** throughout the entire process.
- **Provide an avenue for the employee to identify training needed.**
- **Provide a more user-friendly program** by providing standardized elements.

Introduction to Performance Management

General Information

What is Performance Management?

Performance management is a management function which includes the processes of planning, monitoring, developing, appraising, and rewarding performance.

What is the purpose of the Service Center Agencies' Performance Management Program?

The purpose is to improve individual and organizational performance, program effectiveness, and accountability by focusing on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction, and by aligning standards and elements with organizational goals and strategic plans.

Who is covered by the Program?

This program covers **ALL** non-SES employees, who are reasonably expected to be employed for greater than 90 days, in Rural Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency, including FSA County employees. Schedule C employees are covered by this program but are not afforded any rights as established by 5 United States Code (USC) 4303.

What are the legal authorities that govern Performance Management?

This program complies with the USDA Performance Management System established on June 12, 1996; Chapter 43 of Title 5 of the U.S. Code; and Part 430, Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Responsibilities

What are the responsibilities of employees?

Employees are responsible for:

- Communicating with the supervisor throughout the appraisal period.
- Participating in the development of work plans and measurable performance standards.
- Assuring that they have a clear understanding of their rating official's expectations and requesting clarification when necessary.
- Assisting in identifying training needs to enhance performance.
- Managing performance to achieve expectations and bringing to the rating official's attention circumstances that may affect achievement of standards.
- Participating in discussions of individual performance.
- Actively listening and considering feedback with an open mind.
- Providing input on accomplishments.
- Improving those aspects of performance identified as needing improvement.

What are the responsibilities of the Rating Official?

Rating officials are responsible for:

- Informing employees of the overall mission, objectives, goals, plans, and activities of the agency and work unit and the employee's related duties and responsibilities.
- Providing feedback to the employee through ongoing communication and actively listening and considering feedback from the employee and customers.
- Providing the employee the opportunity to participate in the development of performance work plans.
- Providing employees with written performance work plans which identify the critical performance elements related to their specific duties, responsibilities, and expected levels of performance.
- Conducting and documenting at least one formal progress review around the midpoint of the appraisal period and additional reviews as necessary.
- Completing performance ratings which include evaluating and documenting employees' actual accomplishments and determining summary levels.
- Recommending personnel actions and/or training, as necessary, based on the employee's level of performance in relation to the performance standards and elements.

- Addressing concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Reviewing Official?

Reviewing Officials are responsible for:

- Reviewing and concurring in "results not achieved" ratings.
- Resolving differences between employees and rating officials concerning ratings and adjusting ratings when necessary.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Servicing Human Resources Offices?

Servicing Human Resources Offices are responsible for:

- Providing technical and operational support and advice to the rating officials to help them administer the performance management program in a manner consistent with applicable laws, rules, and regulations;.
- Ensuring that performance work plans and ratings of record are maintained in the Servicing Human Resources Office in accordance with the requirements in 5 CFR Parts 293 and 297.
- Providing training on the performance management program and their responsibilities.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Human Resource Directors?

Human Resource Directors are responsible for:

- Setting policy and for providing overall technical guidance and direction of the program.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Agency Heads?

Agency Heads are responsible for:

- Tailoring Departmental policy to meet the individual needs of the Agency.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Department?

The **Department of Agriculture** is responsible for:

- Developing Departmental policy that complies with all legal authorities.
- Monitoring and evaluating agencies' performance management programs.
- Providing advice/assistance to agencies in administering their programs.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

What are the responsibilities of the Union Officials?

Union Officials are responsible for:

- Assisting management and employees to ensure that the program is administered consistent with negotiated labor-management agreements.
- Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

Guidance and Procedures

Developing Performance Plans

When should new performance plans be established?

Standards should be established:

- Within 30 days of appointment.
- If employee is reassigned/promoted to a new position.
- If an employee is being detailed to a different area for more than the minimal appraisal period.
- Within 30 days of the beginning of an appraisal period.
- If the duties of the position are substantially changed during the established appraisal period.

What is a performance work plan?

A *performance work plan* is a written document that identifies *critical* elements of an employee's position and the standards by which they will be rated.

What is a critical element?

A *critical element* is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is at the unacceptable, or "Results Not Achieved," level.

Non-critical duties are not included in performance plans.

What is the difference between an element and a standard?

An *element* is a component of a position consisting of one or more duties and responsibilities which contribute toward accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organization.

A *standard* is a management-approved expression of the performance threshold(s), requirement(s), or expectations(s) that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance. It may include, but is not limited to, quality, quantity, cost-efficiency, timeliness, and manner of performance.

How is the plan developed?

Communication between the rating official and the employee is essential in developing performance work plans. Rating officials and employees should work together to jointly clarify how competencies apply within the work environment so that there is a common understanding about the expectations for performance. In addition, there should be a discussion of the goals of the individual work unit and the employee's involvement, or contribution, to unit goals for the upcoming year.

Elements should be based on organizational goals, strategic plans, position descriptions, and internal and external customer needs. The standards should focus on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction.

The employee and rating official sign and date the plan indicating that it has been discussed and that the employee has had the opportunity to obtain a clear understanding of expectations.

What methods could be used to assist in developing work plans that reflect organizational goals and strategic plans?

Appendix B, *Quick Reference for Developing Employee Performance Plans That Link to Organizational Goals*, provides an 8-step method which can be used to incorporate organizational goals and objectives.

What is the established format?

Performance plans are developed on SCA Form 4140, Performance Work Plan. (See Appendix A.) This form provides a description of the element and the results expected. The form also has a place for employees and rating officials to provide further clarification of performance expectations, if needed. The employee and rating official may also provide written comments during the progress review, if desired. The form also contains discussion topics for use in planning performance and conducting progress reviews.

How many elements are required in a performance plan?

Employees may have a minimum of two, but no more than five, rating elements in their performance plans.

What types of elements may be included in a performance plan?

Only critical elements may be included in the performance plan. All employees must have at least one job specific performance element. This may include supervision, individual contributions to team accomplishments, execution of duties, etc., or an element may be specifically written for this purpose in the blank numbered blocks provided at the end of the standardized elements.

A mandatory Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights (EO/CR) element is required as a stand-alone element for all supervisory and managerial officials (Element 9). Employees who are not supervisors must also have an EO/CR standard; this has been incorporated into Element 10.

What is an additional performance element?

Additional performance elements provide agencies another tool for communicating performance expectations important to the organization. In essence, they are dimensions or aspects of overall performance that the agency wishes to communicate and appraise, but which will not be used in assigning a summary level. Such additional elements may include objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other methods of expressing expected performance. Further information on additional elements and examples are provided in Appendix D.

If additional performance elements are not attached to the performance plan, what purpose do they serve?

Additional performance elements communicate a fuller picture of the performance that is expected and encourage dialogue between supervisors, employees, and peers that otherwise might not have taken place. They provide a tool for monitoring and tracking team and/or group performance and individual expectations toward accomplishing organizational goals.

What is the established format for additional elements?

Additional elements are to be provided separately in a format best suited for the element and are not attached to the performance plan. A simple form is provided in Appendix D.

What if there is disagreement with the content of the performance plan?

The rating official and the employee should attempt to resolve the disagreement informally. If an agreement cannot be reached, the rating official's decision prevails.

What are the alternatives if a performance plan is not received within the specified timeframe?

If an employee does not receive a performance plan within the specified timeframe, they should contact their rating official to inquire of the status and request a meeting to jointly develop the standards. If standards are still not established, the employee should seek assistance from the rating official's supervisor or their Servicing Human Resources Office. Bargaining unit employees may also seek the assistance of their exclusive representative.

What if an employee refuses to sign a Performance Plan?

If the employee refuses to sign the performance work plan, the supervisor should note this in the employee's signature block, along with the date the plan was discussed and implemented. Lack of the employee's signature does not negate implementation of the plan.

Can performance plans be grieved?

By law, the contents of a performance plan cannot be grieved.

Who retains the performance plan?

Throughout the appraisal period, the rating official will maintain the original copy of the performance plan. The employee will be provided with a copy.

Monitoring and Appraising Performance

How will performance be monitored and appraised?

The employee and Rating Official will meet periodically throughout the appraisal period to provide feedback relating to performance. This will be accomplished through progress review(s), performance ratings, and ongoing communication. The methods for monitoring performance, i.e., supervisory review, complaints received, etc.,

should be discussed with the employee prior to implementation of the performance plan.

What is the appraisal period?

Appraisal period refers to the period of time during which an employee's performance will be reviewed and a rating of record will be prepared. The appraisal period generally begins on October 1 of each year and ends on September 30 of the following year.

What is the minimum appraisal period?

The *minimum appraisal period* is the 90-calendar-day period of time, or such other period of time as established in local negotiated labor-management agreements, during which an employee must have operated under a performance work plan and for which the employee may receive a performance rating.

What is a Progress Review?

A *progress review* is a joint discussion between the rating official and the employee regarding specific strengths and weaknesses in relation to the employee's performance work plan, as well as any areas of performance which are central to the employee's position. Open dialog between the employee and the rating official is crucial. A progress review does not involve the issuance of a rating of record.

How often are Progress Reviews held?

Progress reviews are conducted at least once during a full appraisal period. Normally, these required reviews will be accomplished during the midpoint of the appraisal period.

Who is responsible for initiating Progress Reviews?

Rating officials are responsible for initiating communication with the employee about actual performance and ensuring progress reviews are held.

What should an employee do if a Progress review is not received?

If a progress review is not conducted, the employee should contact their rating official to inquire of the status. If progress reviews are still not held, the employee should seek assistance from the second level supervisor. Bargaining unit employees may also seek the assistance from their exclusive representative.

How are Progress Reviews documented?

The Rating Official is encouraged to make written comments concerning the employee's performance on SCA Form 4140. The purpose of the written comments is to provide for a more formal identification of the employee's performance in relation to the performance work plan. The employee is also encouraged to provide written comments on the form at this time. Both the employee and the Rating Official *must* initial the appropriate blocks to indicate the discussions were held.

What is a Rating of Record?

A *rating of record* is the final rating issued at the end of the appraisal period. It becomes a part of the employee's performance file (EPF) maintained in the Servicing Human Resources Office. A rating of "Results Achieved" or "Results Not Achieved" is assigned to each element at this time, as well as the overall summary rating.

When is a Rating of Record given?

Normally, the rating of record is issued annually for the appraisal period ending September 30. Employees who have not served under established standards for the minimum appraisal period must have the timeframe extended to meet this requirement. Once the minimum appraisal period has been completed, a rating of record must be issued.

Are ratings of record given at the completion of details and temporary promotions?

No; however, the rating official to whom the employee was detailed will document the employee's accomplishments and forward the information to the employee's permanent supervisor to be considered when completing the annual performance rating of record.

Are ratings of record given when there is a change in positions and/or supervisors?

No; however, each individual who supervised the employee for 90 days or more during the appraisal period should discuss the performance with the employee, prepare feedback comments, and forward them to the current rating official.

Are ratings of record given when there is a reassignment or promotion but no change of supervisor?

No; however, the supervisor should prepare written documentation of the employee's performance under the previous position and this information will be considered in the employee's annual rating of record.

What is the difference between a rating of "Results Achieved" and "Results Not Achieved?"

An overall summary level of "Results Achieved" means that the employee has met the performance expectations for each element. "Results Not Achieved" means that the employee has not met performance expectations for one or more element(s) and constitutes unacceptable

performance.

How are Ratings of Record documented?

The rating official places a checkmark in the "Achieved" or "Not Achieved" column on SCA Form 4140 indicating the individual element rating for only those elements selected to be a part of the performance work plan.

"Results Achieved" performance requires no written comments and requires only the signatures of the rating official and the employee. No higher level review is required.

"Results Not Achieved" performance requires written comments to be attached to the performance work plan and must be signed by the rating official and the reviewing official prior to presenting to the employee for signature.

What if the employee refuses to sign the rating of record?

The employee's signature only indicates receipt of the rating; it does not represent agreement with the rating. If the employee refuses to sign the rating of record, the rating official should note this in the appropriate block and indicate the date the rating was issued.

What if performance improvement is needed?

If improvement is needed at any time during the appraisal period, the rating official should discuss and consider reasonable means by which to assist the employee in improving. Such means may include training, closer supervision, revision of assignments, coaching, or placing the employee under an official opportunity-to-improve period (OTI). This may also be referred to as a performance improvement period (PIP), opportunity period, or improvement period.

It is the responsibility of the Rating Official to contact the Servicing Human Resources Office to determine the appropriate course of action.

When is an OTI necessary?

An OTI is necessary as soon as it is determined that one or more element(s) is found to be at the "Results Not Achieved" level. This determination can be made at any time during the appraisal cycle; it is not necessary to wait until the actual rating of record is completed. The Rating Official and employee, with the technical assistance of the Servicing Human Resources Office, will then jointly complete SCA Form 4140-A, Opportunity to Improve (see Appendix E).

What is the purpose of an OTI?

An OTI provides the employee a reasonable opportunity to improve performance to the acceptable level.

Components of the plan consist of:

- the length of time it is in effect,
- the element(s) which is/are unacceptable,
- the specific deficiencies,
- the required improvement(s) to raise performance,
- the support/assistance to be provided, and
- the frequency of follow-up reviews.

What is the duration of an OTI?

The OTI (SCA Form 4140-A) states the length of time for which it is in effect, which must be a minimum of 60 days. The duration will be determined by considering the type of position for which the OTI is being prepared, the types of improvement needed, the amount of reasonable time necessary to demonstrate the acceptable performance, and applicable negotiated labor-management agreements.

What will happen at the end of the OTI period?

A final review will be conducted and will state whether performance meets or does not meet expectations. If it does not meet expectations, then the rating official must provide written comments supporting this determination. The rating official will contact the Servicing Human Resources Office to determine further action necessary.

What happens if performance is at the acceptable level at the close of the OTI?

At the end of the OTI if performance is at the "results achieved" level, the employee must sustain acceptable performance in the element(s) which resulted in the OTI for one year from the commencement date. Should performance later reach an unacceptable level in the same element(s), a performance-based adverse action, or other alternative action, may be proposed without the benefit of an additional improvement period.

What if performance remains unacceptable?

If an employee's performance remains unacceptable at the conclusion of the improvement period, the employee shall be reassigned, reduced in grade, or removed.

Linkage to Other Actions

What impact does a Rating of Record have on within-grade increases (WGI's) and promotions?

No employee shall receive a WGI or promotion unless the most recent rating of record is "Results Achieved." A "Results Achieved" rating is not the only criteria for promotion.

Will employees still have the opportunity to receive recognition based on performance?

Yes; employees will be eligible for quality step increases and other forms of recognition based on outstanding accomplishments. Procedures and criteria for nominating and approving performance-based recognition are covered in the Employee Recognition Policy. SSBD 4130-01.

Will employees still receive service credit and retention standing for reduction-in-force (RIF) purposes?

Yes; ratings will continue to be used to establish service credit and retention standing for RIF purposes. To provide adequate time to properly determine an employee's retention standing prior to a RIF, a general or specific RIF notice will specify the date after which no new rating of record will be given that could be used to determine retention standing and will address how service credit will be applied. Employees should pay particular attention to these notices.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Performance Work Plan

Appendix B: Quick Reference for Developing Employee Performance Plans That

Link to Organizational Goals

Appendix C: Developing Performance Plans

Appendix D: The Additional Element

Appendix E: Opportunity to Improve

**United States Department of Agriculture
Service Center Agencies
Performance Work Plan**

Employee's Name: _____ Rating Period: _____

Title/Series/Grade: _____ Organization: _____

Duty Location: _____ Social Security No.: _____

PART I. PERFORMANCE PLAN

CRITICAL RESULTS (*Check a Minimum of 2/Maximum of 5 Applicable Elements*)

The narrative statement describes the "Results Achieved" level of performance. Where applicable, quantity, quality, and timeliness are derived directly from appropriate agency regulations, policies, instructions, work plans, etc. If no agency or regulatory guidelines exist, further clarification will be provided by the rating official.

meets the needs of the organization. Solutions developed demonstrate improvements in work methods. Work products do not require substantive revisions. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable agency guidelines, including timeframes. Further clarification, as needed:

Element #2 - Communications

As a rule, oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and accurate. Further clarification, as needed:

Element #3 - Supervision

W ☐ is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is ordinarily provided in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedure. Issues, concerns, or problems are handled promptly and fairly. To the extent possible, staff is properly trained and complies with occupational health and safety programs. Management decisions are supported and implemented within appropriate timeframes. Further clarification, as needed:

<p style="text-align: center;">Element #4 - Team Leadership</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> R nely leads individuals and team members toward specific goals and accomplishments. Provides encouragement, guidance, and direction as needed. Adjusts style to fit situation. Delegates appropriate authority in an effective manner. Coordinates functions of the team Members. Demonstrates a sincere interest in employees' activities, abilities, etc. Further clarification, as needed: </p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Achieved</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Not Achieved</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Element #5 - Program Management</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> M akes program(s) resolving issues and problems within the employee's control. Monitors all aspects of program(s) for quality, effectiveness, and consistency. Program plans and guidance are responsive to objectives and requirements of the Agency. Policy instructions are appropriately issued and are accurate. Evaluates effectiveness of work and adjusts plans accordingly. Further clarification, as needed: </p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Element #6 - Special Projects</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> S pecial projects are regularly completed on time in a competent, accurate, and thorough manner. Completed projects comply with regulations and procedures. Special projects are completed independently, or reflect research and collaboration with others as required. Further clarification, as needed: </p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Element #7 - Research and Analysis</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> T houghly and accurately researches issues in a timely manner, using available reference sources (e.g. USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations). Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance. Further clarification, as needed: </p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Element #8 - Customer Service</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> P rovides advice that is timely, responsive, and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with Internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relationships with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes action to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees. Further clarification, as needed: </p>		

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Element #9 - Equal Opportunity & Civil Rights [Mandatory for supervisors and managers] Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce. Further clarification, as needed:</p>	<p><i>Achieved</i></p>	<p><i>Not Achieved</i></p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Element #10 - Personal Contacts - EO/CR [Mandatory for all non-supervisory employees] Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior towards internal and external customers, supervisors, coworkers, and/or team members. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce. Further clarification, as needed:</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Element #11 - Resource Management Manages allocated funds and maintains complete and accurate records of expenditures. Routinely utilizes resources in an efficient and effective manner. Ensures that funds, property and other resources are guarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, and misappropriation. Further clarification, as needed:</p>		
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Element #12 - Individual Contributions to the Team Obviously displays dependability and reliability. Promotes open communication. Contributes creative ideas and actively participates in team meetings resulting in added value to the team's products and services. When problems arise, explores causes and assists in resolving them. Works with team members to appropriately implement decisions. Is usually open-minded to new ideas and approaches in implementing the team's goals. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism. Further clarification, as needed:</p>		

<input data-bbox="207 233 267 294" type="checkbox"/> <div data-bbox="383 220 604 247">Element # 13 -</div>	<div data-bbox="1036 252 1153 310">Achieved</div>	<div data-bbox="1179 220 1279 310">Not Achieved</div>
<input data-bbox="207 596 267 657" type="checkbox"/> <div data-bbox="396 583 620 611">Element # 14 -</div>		
<input data-bbox="207 959 267 1020" type="checkbox"/> <div data-bbox="396 947 620 974">Element # 15 -</div>		

PART II. PROGRESS REVIEW: *One progress review is required; however, frequent communication between the employee and rating official regarding performance is encouraged and recommended. Date of review, initials of employee (Emp), and initials of Rating Official (R.O.) must be provided for each review. Employee and Rating Official are encouraged to provide written comments.*

Rating Official's Comments:

Employee's Comments:

Date: _____
Emp Initials: _____
R.O. Initials: _____

**DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR USE IN PLANNING PERFORMANCE AND CONDUCTING PROGRESS
REVIEWS**

- * Employee's performance on primary responsibilities/priorities in the past year.
 - revise performance work plan for the coming year, as necessary
 - relationship to overall work unit objectives
- * Employee's strengths and areas for growth
- * Barriers to effective work performance and job satisfaction
- * Employee's development (over the past year; future needs for current job ; long-term career goals and developmental needs to achieve them)
- * Possible work process improvements
- * Whether employee continues to grow to meet future needs and demands of the changing environment
- * Employee's feedback/constructive suggestions for supervisor
- * Anything else the employee or supervisor would like to address

PART III. SUMMARY RATING: RESULTS ACHIEVED

☐

RESULTS NOT

ACHIEVED

☐

A "Results Not Achieved" rating requires explanation. Provide additional comments as an attachment.

PART IV. CERTIFICATION: (*Employee's signature certifies review and discussion with the Rating Official. It does not necessarily mean that the employee concurs with the information on this form*).

Performance Plan: (Sign when plan is established)

Summary Rating: (Sign when rating is completed)

Employee

Date

Employee

Date

Rating Official
Date

Date

Rating Official

I have reviewed the standards of conduct and have had any

questions answered to my satisfaction.

Reviewing Official Date

(Employee, initial the appropriate block below.)
for summary rating of

(required

"Results Not Achieved")

Yes

☐

No

☐

<p style="text-align: center;">QUICK REFERENCE FOR DEVELOPING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE PLANS THAT LINK TO ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS</p>

- Step 1** **Look at the overall picture.**
Review organizational goals and objectives and performance measures already available. Determine which goals and measures the employee's work unit can affect.
- Step 2** **Determine what's going to be measured at the work unit level using any or all of the following methods:**
- Method A** (*Results-Oriented*) Cascade the organization's mission
or goals to the work unit level.
Determine the work unit's accomplishment(s) that directly affect the organization's mission or goals.
- Method B** (*Results-Oriented*) Determine the product(s) or service(s)
(i.e., the accomplishments) that the work unit supplies or provides to its customers.
- Method C** (*Process-Oriented*) Develop a process flow chart for the
work unit. Establish key steps in the work process(es).
These are the steps that should be measured.
- Step 3** **Develop performance elements that support work unit goals and mission or work processes.**
Performance work plans can only include critical elements that address individual performance. However, one way to ensure that those assignments and responsibilities are linked to the organization's mission and goals would be to derive elements from work unit results. The most important aspects of unit performance (results and/or processes) are identified in Step 2.
- Step 4** **Determine which performance elements should be critical elements and mark these on the performance work plan.**
There is a good possibility that the element should be critical if the element is a major component of the work, if serious consequences would result if the employee performed it unacceptably, if the element requires a significant amount of the employee's time, or if there is a statutory or regulatory requirement related to its performance.

Step 5

Develop work unit and individual measures.

For each element or work accomplishment, determine which general measure(s) (i.e., quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost-effectiveness) are important. Determine how to measure the quantity, quality, timeliness and/or cost-effectiveness for the element. If an accomplishment can be measured with numbers, determine the unit of measurement to be used. If performance can only be described (i.e., observed and verified), clarify who would appraise the work and what factors they would look for.

Step 6

Develop work unit and individual standards.

A *successful* standard must be established for each critical element. Write the performance requirement(s) or expectation(s) that must be met to be *successful*.

If the measure for the element is numeric, determine minimum number(s) that would represent successful performance. If the measure for the element is descriptive, determine what the rater would see or report that would verify that performance expectations for that element had been met and below which a performance problem would exist.

If other work accomplishments or achievements are to be tracked and measured, it is recommended that employees be given a clear idea of the performance expectations to help them and their work units focus on what they are to do. Avoid absolute and backwards standards.

Step 7

Determine how performance will be monitored.

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, the source of the data, and whether all the data or just a sample should be collected. Determine when the data should be collected, who should collect it, and who should receive it. Review existing reports for possible use as feedback reports. Create feedback tables or graphs where appropriate, necessary, or desired. Try to design feedback processes that give employees feedback automatically.

Step 8

Check the performance plan to ensure that elements and standards are effective and meet regulatory requirements.

Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/or verifiable? Does failure on the element mean that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable? Are the standards attainable and challenging and are expectations reasonable? Do they allow for some margin of error? Can the rater manage the data collected through the measurement process? etc . . .

Developing Performance Plans

This section further describes the 8-step process for developing performance plans for an individual employee as outlined in Exhibit 2 in this handbook. If you are beginning work on employees' performance plans "from scratch," it may be easiest for you to do each of the steps in order, just as they are presented here. However, individual circumstances or preferences may require that one or more steps be done out of sequence. In addition, the information developed during a later step may require you to revise the material you developed in a previous step. The bottom line is that the 8-step process is a tool intended for your use. Use it in the way which best helps you.

Step 1: Look at the big picture.

To complete this step, you should obtain copies of any available documents which describe your organization's mission and strategic plan, and any organization/program goals or customer service standards which are already in place. For field personnel, goals and objectives developed for your State, Area/Regional, or Local Office would be useful.

Review these materials to help identify goals and objectives which may apply directly to your work unit, or which, through a cascading effect, have an impact on your operations. While these materials may not tell you exactly what your own work unit's goals should be, they will at least point you in the right direction and help you answer the question, "What does my work unit do that supports mission area (and/or service center) goals?"

Step 2: Determine what's going to be measured at the work unit level. Focus on accomplishments.

Three different methods may be used to accomplish this step.

Method A: Cascade the mission or goals of the agency down to the work unit level.

Method B: Determine the value-added accomplishments (i.e., the results) the work unit provides for its customers

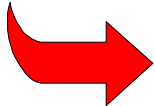
Method C: Develop a process flow chart for the work unit.

Each of these methods is described on the following page. You might prefer one method over another based on the characteristics of your organization, or on how easy it is to come up with information using a particular method. Some individuals get good results using all three methods and comparing or combining the results.

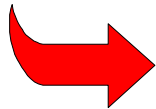
Method A: (Results-oriented.) Cascade the mission or goals of the agency down to the work unit level. Start out with a goal at the highest level of the organization and move down progressively lower in the organization, identifying one or more goals at each level through the work unit level.

For example,

Farm Service Agency
Mission/Goals (obtain from
Strategic Plan) . . .



Program Mission/Goals
(obtain from either the program area's strategic plan or
by translating FSA Mission/Goals down to program
program level mission/goals) . . .



Headquarters

Work Unit Products and Services
(This may be the State Office level,
level, Regional Office level (NRCS), etc.)

This is the cascade or "trickle down" effect. In essence, you are mapping your organization's mission and/or goals as they cascade or "trickle down" to the work unit. When this is done, try to show how your work unit's goals and objectives link to the higher level mission and goals.

Method B: (Results-oriented.) Determine the value-added accomplishments (i.e., the results) the work unit provides for its customers. Use Method B (the customer-focused method) to identify the product(s) or service(s) that your work unit provides.

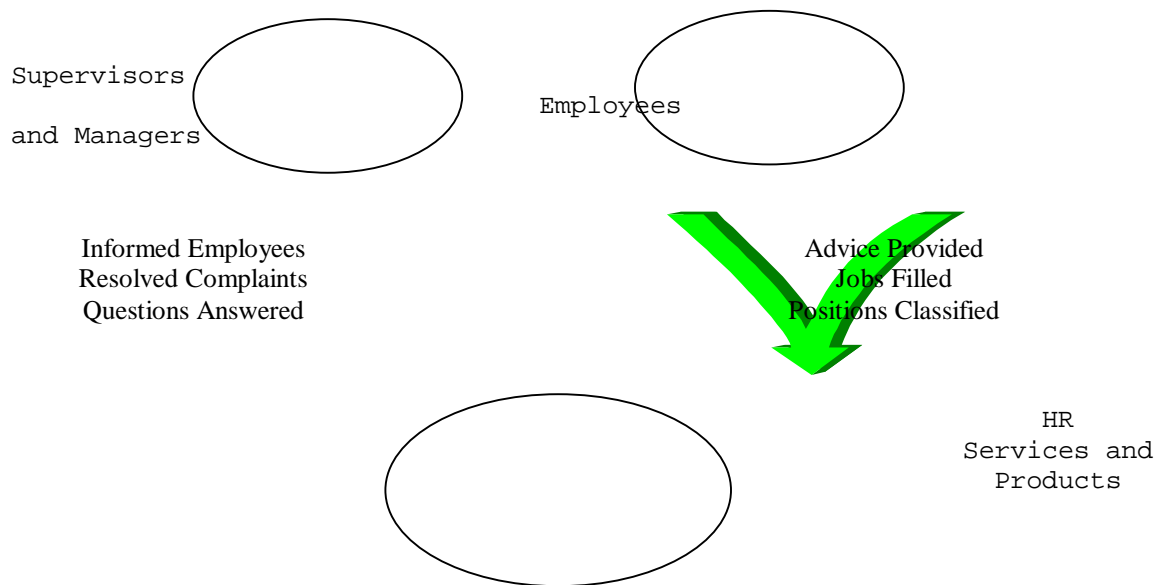
Before using this method, you first need to answer the following questions:

Who are the customers of the work unit?

What products and/or services do the customers expect?

Begin with listing your work unit's customers. Next, determine what product(s) or service(s) your work unit supplies or provides to its customers. Identify your work unit's products, services, etc., as accomplishments (i.e., advice provided) rather than activities (provides advice).

The following diagram shows the results of an analysis, using Method B, of the accomplishments of the Human Resources function.



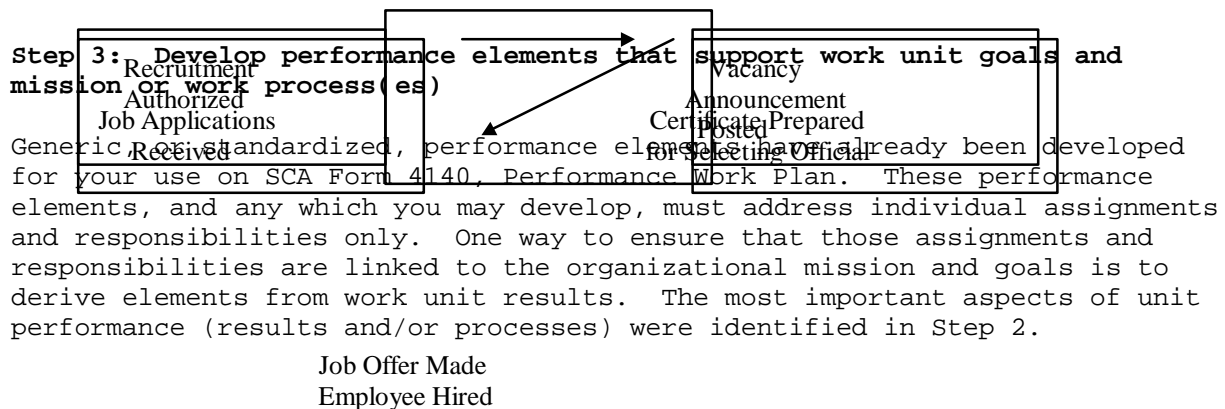
Method C: (Process-oriented.) Develop a process flow chart for the work unit. Establish key steps in the work process. These are the steps that should be measured.

Before using this method, you should first answer these questions:

How does the work unit achieve its results?

Which are the most important steps in the process? (These are the steps that probably should be measured.)

Map out the work process(es) of your work unit. Focus on the major categories or steps of the work. You may need to first list the smaller steps of the work and then group them into major categories. The following process map shows the key steps in filling a job vacancy -- one of the many processes carried out in a typical human resources office.



Elements that address individual achievements can be identified using a role-results matrix. List the work unit accomplishments (i.e., results or process steps, products, or services) across the top of the matrix. List each member of the work unit or each job position down the left side of the matrix. In each cell, list the assignment or responsibility (i.e., performance element) that the member must produce or perform to support the work unit accomplishment or process step. All performance elements should be either quantifiable or verifiable (i.e., using quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost effectiveness). (Note: Do not identify as elements those aspects of performance which neither the work unit nor the individual can control or which are impractical to measure.)

(Example of matrix follows on next page.)

Responsibilities (Accomplishments)	
Service	Sound Advice Provided - Jobs Informed Employees - Resolved Member Filled - Positions Classified Complaints - Questions Answered
HR	Guidance and technical assistance to Process for communicating with workforce Director Personnel Management Specialists Process for receiving and resolving employee and managers complaints Approved personnel policies Approved Merit Promotion certificates
Personnel	Advice and assistance to supervisors Information gaps identified Managementand managers Recommendations to close workforce Specialist Positions evaluated and classified information gap Position Reports prepared Complaints investigated Prepared vacancy announcements Complaints resolved Qualified candidates referred for employment
Personnel	Answers to routine personnel questions Informative materials prepared, copied, and Clerks Applicant Notification distributed Closed vacancy files
<p>Step 4: Determine which performance elements should be critical elements.</p> <p>Remember, a critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance (e.g., results not achieved) in that element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable. All performance elements under the performance</p>	

management program implemented January 1, 1999, are critical elements. Employees must have at least two, but no more than 5, elements in their performance plans. If the generic ones don't suit your needs, the form, SCA Form 4140, Performance Work Plan, provides blank space for 3 elements of your choosing -- just be sure they are *critical*.

Work unit or team performance can be measured and tracked but can only be included in an employee's performance plan to the extent that it measures the *individual's* contribution to the team. Team elements, as such, may not be included as a critical element in the performance plan. They must be addressed as an additional performance element (see Appendix 5).

How do managers, work units, and employees figure out which elements are critical? Answer the following questions. If the answer to any one or more of them is yes, then there is a good possibility that the element should be critical.

- Is the element a major component of the work?
- If the employee performed unacceptably on the element, would there be serious consequences to completing the work of the organization? (What would those consequences be?)
- Does the element require a significant amount of the employee's time?
- Is there a statutory or regulatory requirement related to performance of this element?

Using the human resources function, as we have in the past examples, here is an example of how the HR Director and employee might designate which elements are critical for the Personnel Management Specialist position.

Element	Type of Element
1. Advice and assistance to supervisors and managers Critical	
2. Position classification (positions evaluated and classified) Critical	
Preparation of position reports	
3 Recruitment (prepared announcements/qualified candidates) Critical	
Information gaps identified	
Complaint investigation and resolution	

4. HR Service Accomplishment (not critical) Additional (Group-level performance to be tracked and measured, but not included in the performance plan.) - Informed employees	
5. Individual Accomplishment (not critical) Additional (Individual performance to be tracked and measured for awards purposes.) - Recommendations for closing information gap in workforce	

In the previous example, Element #1, Advice and assistance to supervisors and managers, could easily be evaluated by using Element #2, Communications, in the Performance Work Plan. Elements #2 and #3 concern work products and would fit in with Element #1 of the Performance Work Plan, Execution of Duties. Under our program, another element which would be required for this nonsupervisory position is Element #10, Personal Contacts - EO/CR. So, by identifying the critical aspects of this job, you have determined three elements to use in the Performance Work Plan. If the employee is responsible for administering any programs, Element #5, Program Management, would provide another element; and if the employee received multiple special projects in his/her position, Element #6, Special Projects, would provide another workable element.

Again, in this example, Elements #4 and #5 would be considered as additional performance elements and would not be included in the performance plan. See Appendix E for information on additional elements.

Step 5: Determine work unit and individual measures.

Measures are the yardsticks used to determine how well work units and employees produce (or provide) products (or services). For each critical element or accomplishment that you want to track and measure, determine which general measure(s) (i.e., quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost-effectiveness) are important. Determine how to measure the quantity, quality, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness for the accomplishment. If an accomplishment can be measured with numbers, record the form of measurement to be used. If performance can only be described non-numerically, determine who would observe and verify the work and what characteristics they would look for.

Measures. *Quality* addresses how well the work is performed and/or how accurate or how effective the final product is. Quality refers to accuracy, appearance, usefulness, or effectiveness. Quality can be expressed as an error rate, percentage of errors allowable per unit of work, or as a general result to be achieved.

Examples of quality measures using numerics include:

- has less than 2% error rate;
- 78% of customers are satisfied with the product;
- 95% of products meet design specifications.

Examples of descriptive quality measures include:

- Advice and recommendations consistently represent sound policy and principles, supporting Administration initiatives and current agency strategic goals.
- Written products generally follow the principles outlined by the President's Plain Language memo and NPR guidance, including logical organization, descriptive section headings, simple terms, and good usage of tables, lists, graphics, and white space.
- Routinely responds to each customer request with the most accurate and complete information available; if the employee cannot answer a question completely, s/he generally provides name and phone number for the proper contact; if the question requires additional research, keeps the customer apprised of progress.

In developing quality measures, just ask the following questions for each results statement:

How could quality be measured? If it can't be measured numerically, ask "Who could judge that the result was done well? What factors would they look for? If the judge is the customer, ask: What does the customer expect from this product or service?

Quantity addresses how much work is produced or the volume or amount of work expected. Examples of quantity measures include:

- 600 transactions
- 250 incoming calls
- Produces at least one major product (e.g., a workshop, complex paper, report, often over 10 pages long); at least three intermediate, in scope, products (e.g., topic papers or overviews 3 - 10 pages long); OR at least five minor products (e.g., newsletter articles, 1 - 2 page papers), OR a combination of these. (To meet the definition of "produces," the report or paper at least must be cleared by the Division Chief.)

Timeliness addresses how quickly, when, or by what date the work is produced. The most common error made in setting timeliness standards is to allow no margin for error, and hence, creating an absolute standard. An example of a timeliness measure is: Employee initially responds to customer requests for assistance within at least 8 working hours from receipt of request.

Cost-Effectiveness addresses dollar savings to the Government. Standards that address cost-effectiveness should be based on specific resource levels (money, personnel, or time) that generally can be documented and measured in an organization's annual fiscal year budgets. Cost-effectiveness standards may include such aspects of performance as maintaining or reducing unit costs, reducing the time it takes to produce (provide) a product (service), or reducing waste.

Regardless of the type of measure being used, the standard at the Results Achieved, or fully successful, level should be written to be challenging, yet attainable. If the measure is numeric, list what will be tracked or counted. If the measure is descriptive, identify the factors or indicators which the rater will use.

Step 6: Develop work unit and individual standards.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and the courts have held that an agency must ensure that:

- Standards are reasonably attainable;
- Standards are not impermissibly absolute (allow for no error); and
- Standards inform the employee of the level of performance needed to retain his or her job.

Performance standards are generally expressed in terms of the measures identified in Step 5 (i.e., quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness). If the measure for the element is numeric, determine the minimum number(s) that would represent *Results Achieved* (e.g. fully successful) performance. If the measure for the element is descriptive, determine what the rater would see or report that would verify that performance expectations for that element had been met and below which a performance problem would exist.

In our past 5-level performance management program, ranges were used to express measures. This was because there were two levels above the fully successful level at which an employee may be rated. Now, with a 2-level program, ranges are no longer needed as there are no levels above the fully successful level (Level 3). For example, we might have used "no more than 3 - 8% errors per quarter, as determined by the supervisor." Under the 2-level program, this standard would be stated as "no more than 8% errors per quarter," Only a single number, or single point of performance, is necessary in a program that appraises elements at two levels.

The next page contains sample standards for the personnel management specialist position discussed in previous examples.

Example of Performance Standards

Element	Type	Measure	Standard
1. Advice and assistance to supervisors and managers	CE	<p>Quality: Accurate and responsive advice in response to issues raised.</p> <p>Timeliness: Provided in manner that meets time constraints of supervisor/ manager.</p>	<p>Advice is consistently provided without substantive errors.</p> <p>Advice is consistently provided within needed timeframes.</p>
2. Position classification	CE	<p>Timeliness: PDs are evaluated in a timely manner</p> <p>Quality: Classification actions reflect proper evaluation against relevant standards. When needed, position and desk audit reports are thorough.</p>	<p>PDs are consistently evaluated within 10 working days of receipt.</p> <p>Classification recommendations are generally accepted. Position and desk audit reports generally do not require revision.</p>
3. Recruitment	CE	<p>Timeliness: Recruitment initiated in timely manner.</p> <p>Quality: Vacancy announcements are consistently accurate:</p> <p>Quantity: Recruitment process generally yields sufficient number of well-qualified applicants.</p>	<p>Recruitment efforts consistently initiated within 5 working days of authorization.</p> <p>Announcements are in accordance with PD, merit promotion plan, and OPM qualification standards.</p> <p>Area of consideration and outreach efforts produce at least 3 well-qualified applicants.</p>

4. HR Service Accomplishment: Informed employees	AE	Quantity: Methods are developed to provide information/guidance to employees on HR programs (e.g., benefits, pay, etc.). Quality: Information/guidance meets employee needs.	Guidance on three programs developed and distributed. Reduction in number of requests for information/ guidance.
5. Individual Accomplishment: Close information gap in workforce	AE	Quantity: New lines of communication identified to respond to employee questions/concerns.	At least one new approach implemented to improve communications.

Note: All Standards are provided at the Level 3, or Results Achieved level (e.g., Fully Successful).

General Advice about Developing Performance Standards :

Avoid Absolute Standards. An "absolute" standard, one that allows for no errors, is acceptable only in certain circumstances. Where a single failure to meet the standard would result in loss of life, injury, breach of national security or great monetary loss, an agency can legitimately defend its decision to require perfection from its employees. In other circumstances, the MSPB and the courts will usually find that the agency abused its discretion by establishing standards that allow for no margin of error.

Here are some questions to help you identify and determine the appropriateness of absolute standards.

- How many times may the employee fail this requirement and still be acceptable? (If the answer is "zero," you may have an absolute standard.)
- Does the standard use words such as "all," "never," and "each"? (These words do not automatically create an absolute standard, but they often alert you to problems.)
- If the standard allows for no errors, would it be valid according to the criteria listed above (risk of death, injury, etc.)?

Avoid "Backwards" Standards. The law requires that a performance standard describe the level of performance needed for retention in the position. Standards such as "fails to meet deadlines" or "performs work inaccurately" allow an employee to do virtually no work or to do it poorly and still meet the standard. These standards are invalid.

Here are some questions to help you identify "backwards" standards.

- Does the standard express the level of work the supervisor wants to see or does it describe negative performance?
- If the employee did nothing, would s/he meet the standard? (Example: Completes less than four products per year.)
- If the employee requires assistance all of the time, would s/he meet the standard? (Example: Requires assistance more than 50% of the time.)

Step 7: Determine how performance will be monitored.

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, which source(s) the data should come from, and whether all the data or just a sample should be collected. Determine when the data should be collected, who should collect it, and who should receive it. Review existing reports for possible use as feedback reports. Create feedback tables or graphs where necessary (only for additional elements). Try to design feedback processes that give employees feedback automatically. *Note: You cannot seek feedback from external sources (non-government sources).*

(See next page for example.)

Example: Monitoring Performance Standards

Element and Type	Measure	Standard	Feedback Source for Monitoring
1. Advice and assistance to supervisors and managers (Critical)	<p>Quality: Accurate and responsive advice in response to issues raised.</p> <p>Timeliness: Provided in manner that meets time constraints of supervisor/ manager.</p>	<p>Advice is consistently provided without substantive errors.</p> <p>Advice is consistently provided within needed timeframes.</p>	<p>Valid complaints and/or customer surveys</p> <p>Valid complaints and/ or customer surveys</p>
2. Position classification (Critical)	<p>Timeliness: PDs are evaluated in a timely manner</p> <p>Quality: Classification actions reflect proper evaluation against relevant standards. When needed, position and desk audit reports are thorough.</p>	<p>PDs are consistently evaluated within 10 working days of receipt.</p> <p>Classification recommendations are generally accepted. Position and desk audit reports generally do not require revision.</p>	<p>PD log</p> <p>Supervisory review</p>
3. Recruitment (Critical)	<p>Timeliness: Recruitment initiated in timely manner.</p> <p>Quality: Vacancy announcements are consistently accurate:</p> <p>Quantity: Recruitment process generally yields sufficient number of well-qualified applicants.</p>	<p>Recruitment efforts consistently initiated within 5 working days of authorization.</p> <p>Announcements are in accordance with PD, merit promotion plan, and OPM qualification standards.</p> <p>Area of consideration and outreach efforts produce at least 3 well-qualified applicants.</p>	<p>Recruitment log</p> <p>Supervisory review</p> <p>Promotion certificates and noncompetitive referral documentation</p>

4. HR Service Accomplishment : Informed employees (Additional, not rated)	Quantity: Methods are developed to provide information/guidance to employees on HR programs (e.g., benefits, pay, etc.). Quality: Information/ guidance meets employee needs.	Guidance on three programs developed and distributed. Reduction in number of requests for information/guidance.	Work control procedures Customer survey and/ or valid complaints
5. Individual Accomplishment : Close information gap in workforce (Additional, not rated)	Quantity: New lines of communication identified to respond to employee questions/concerns.	At least one new approach implemented to improve communications.	Work control procedures

Step 8: Check the performance plan.

Use this checklist to ensure that elements and standards are effective and meet regulatory requirements.

- ☐ Is the range of acceptable performance clear?
- ☐ Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/or verifiable?
- ☐ Are the critical elements truly critical?
- ☐ Does failure on the critical element mean that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable
- ☐ Are the standards attainable?
- ☐ Are expectations reasonable?
- ☐ Are the standards challenging?
- ☐ Does the employee need to exert a reasonable amount of effort to reach successful performance level?
- ☐ Are the standards fair?
- ☐ Are they comparable to what is expected of employees in similar positions?
- ☐ Do they allow for some margin of error?
- ☐ Can the rater use the standards to appraise performance?
- ☐ Can the rater manage the data collected through the measurement process?
- ☐ Can the elements and standards be communicated and understood?
- ☐ Can the employees be expected to understand what is required?
- ☐ Are the elements and standards flexible?
- ☐ Can they be readily adapted to changes in resources or objectives?

**THE
"ADDITIONAL"
PERFORMANCE ELEMENT**

What is an "additional" performance element? An additional performance element is a "dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance that is not a critical element" and cannot be used in assigning a summary rating level.

Why would I want to use an "additional" performance element if it cannot be considered in the performance rating? Reasons why an organization might want to use additional performance elements include:

- New Work Assignment. There may be an aspect of work for which management and employees would want to establish goals, track and measure performance, and develop skills, but which they do not want to count in the summary level. For example, if an employee volunteered to work on a new project that requires new skills, an additional performance element describing the new assignment provides a non-threatening vehicle for planning, measuring, and giving feedback on the employee's performance without counting it in the summary level. In essence, this is a form of a developmental work plan or assignment.
- Group Performance. In our new performance appraisal program, additional performance elements are the only way to include a discussion of group or team (aggregate) performance in the appraisal process. Even though the element assessment is not considered when determining the summary level, managers and employees may use it to manage the group's performance. It is important to involve all members of the group in the goal-setting process and in deciding on what will be measured and how. The group decides on a common objective and goals are then set showing who will do what and when.
- Awards. Additional performance elements may be used to determine awards eligibility since our program no longer bases awards solely on a particular summary level.

EXAMPLES:

- A. You want to automate the work assignment database, but your GS-5 clerical assistant is not experienced in using database software. The overall objective is to automate the work assignment database. You provide the parameters of the project to the employee and maintain ongoing close supervision of its progress. The employee will need to meet with the primary user(s) to identify the purpose and scope of the project and the desired outcomes (i.e., reports, fields, etc.). The employee will determine the appropriate *types* of fields to be used based on the information to be maintained and/or manipulated. Reports are to be designed for attractiveness and usefulness of the information.

- It has been determined that the employee will need to complete, at a minimum, Beginning and Intermediate ACCESS. The employee will be measured on: (1) Quality -- fields used are appropriate; reports are attractive; information provided is useful; (2) Timeliness -- assignment is completed within 6 months of completion of required training; and
- (3) Cost effectiveness (from the perspective of supervision requirements) -- assignment is completed with substantial independence.

The employee and supervisor agree that consideration for recognition will be based on the quality of the completed project. In other words, if the employee at least meets his/her expectations in the quality factor, an award will be considered.

Another option in considering recognition would be to weight each factor and then base the award amount on whether the employee at least meets all criteria of each factor being measured. For example, you decide that quality is the most important factor to you, so a weight of 75% is assigned to that factor. You decide that timeliness and cost effectiveness are somewhat equal to each other in importance and assign each a weight of 12.5%. The total, of course, is weighted at 100% meaning that if employee meets (or exceeds) all criteria, s/he will receive 100% of the award amount. Let's say that the employee meets the criteria for quality and timeliness (87.5%), but required a lot of your time for assistance (i.e., did not meet your expectations in cost effectiveness). You have decided the contribution of the completed work assignment is moderate and that \$350 or 12 hours of time off is appropriate. Since the employee met 87.5% of your expectations, you may opt to award him/her either \$306 (87.5% x \$350) or 11 hours of time off. (Under the employee recognition policy, you should allow the employee to choose the form of recognition they desire whenever possible.)

- B. A team or group decides to track performance in customer service. They decide their overall objective is to strive for excellent in customer satisfaction by having customers assess the team's overall performance in 5 areas: (1) Usefulness of information or assistance; (2) Needs met; (3) Quality of service; (4) Timely service; and (5) Manner of performance by team members/employees. The team decides that at each 3-month interval during the appraisal or survey period, team feedback worksheets will be sent to customers based on the project assignment database (to determine for whom products or services were provided). The customers evaluate the team's performance and return forms/data to team leader (or members). The forms/data provide information for discussion of team performance, i.e., where improvement is needed, where they are doing well, etc. The information is to be used in a positive manner and shared by everyone.

The team decides that at the end of the survey period, awards may be considered if 95% of responses indicate the team at least either met or exceeded expectations in all categories. Individual awards

should be considered where individual team members are mentioned for their service excellence in their participation in a major process improvement or where performance consistently exceeds expectations.

Both of these are relatively simple examples of how an additional element might be used. They may also be used to incorporate organizational goals. Another use might be to capture employee or professional development. Additional performance elements have not been used widely, yet, but their popularity is rising as supervisors discover the possibilities they present for managing performance. Keep in mind that performance-based actions may not be taken for failing to meet an additional performance element, but they do provide a vehicle for use in determining awards eligibility.

For those of you who like forms for ease in implementing programs, there is a form for displaying additional elements and a team feedback worksheet on the following pages. **WARNING! WARNING! Obtaining or soliciting feedback may only be done from within the federal government.** In other words, you may solicit feedback from customers in the same agency or from another federal government agency.

For assistance in developing or using additional elements, contact your servicing human resources office.

United States Department of Agriculture
Service Center Agencies
Additional Performance Element(s) Worksheet

Employee's Name: _____	Position: _____
Organization: _____	
Beginning Date: _____	Ending Date: _____

Additional Element #1 (Objective):

Measurement:

Additional Element #2 (Objective):

Measurement:

Discussion Comments: (Both employee and supervisor or rating official should have the opportunity to provide comments. Use reverse side of this form, if necessary.)

Certification: (Sign when elements are established. Employee's signature certifies review and discussion with the rating official and indicates an understanding that additional performance elements are not rated, not considered in employee's summary rating, and are not included in Employee Performance File (EPF) documentation.)

Employee
Supervisor/Rating Official

Date
Date

Team Feedback Worksheet

Team:

Team Objective:

Assessment made by:

Check the most appropriate squares. You are urged to freely use the "Remarks" sections for significant comments or suggestions for improvement. (You may use the reverse of this form to continue "Remarks" if needed.)

<p>USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION</p> <p>Not Below</p> <p>OR ASSISTANCE</p> <p>satisfactory expectations</p> <p>At what level do you feel the information or assistance provided was applicable to the Remarks:</p>	<p>Met Exceeded Major process</p> <p>expectations expectations improvement</p>
<p>NEEDS MET</p> <p>Do you feel that the information and/or assistance provided met current needs?</p>	<p>Not Below Met Exceeded Major process</p> <p>expectations expectations expectations improvement</p> <p>Remarks:</p>
<p>QUALITY OF SERVICE</p> <p>Exceeded Major process</p> <p>Do you feel you received quality service?</p>	<p>Not Below Met</p> <p>satisfactory improvement</p> <p>Remarks:</p>
<p>TIMELY SERVICE</p> <p>Exceeded Major process</p> <p>Was this team's service provided in a timely manner?</p>	<p>Not Below Met</p> <p>satisfactory improvement</p> <p>Remarks:</p>
<p>TEAM MEMBERS/EMPLOYEES</p> <p>Exceeded Major process</p> <p>satisfactory expectations</p> <p>provide information/service in a courteous, professional and knowledgeable manner?</p> <p>Remarks:</p>	<p>Not Below Met</p> <p>Did team members/employees expectations expectations improvement</p>

Opportunity to Improve

This form documents a plan for required performance improvement when performance does not meet expectations (i.e., the "Results Achieved" level). It lists specific examples of the specific deficiencies and the required improvements to bring performance to the "Results Achieved" level. Additional clarifying information, if provided, must be specified in, or attached to, this plan.

Employee's Name: _____

Position: _____

Organization: _____

Commencing Date: ____/____/____

Plan Duration: _____ Days

Ending Date: ____/____/____

Element(s) Required Improvement	Deficiency(ies) (cite specifics)	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Support to be provided by the supervisor or Rating Official (e.g. training, equipment, etc.) and the frequency of discussions. </div>		

Plan Establishment Signatures:

Employee:

_____ **Date:** ____/____/____

Supervisor/Rating Official:

_____ **Date:** ____/____/____

Regulatory Requirements

- ◆ During this opportunity to improve (OTI), you will be expected to perform all the elements of the performance work plan . You must independently perform these duties at least at the "Results Achieved" level.
- ◆ Upon completion of the OTI, you will be re-evaluated on the element(s) identified in this plan and informed of your performance in relation to your performance work plan.
 - ⇒ If you have achieved the results expected/required, the OTI is concluded and you must maintain this level of performance for one year commencing from the date of the OTI.
 - ⇒ If at any time during this one-year period your performance falls below the "Results Achieved" level in any of the elements specified in this plan, appropriate remedial action will be proposed. This may include, but is not limited to, a downgrade to a different position or removal from your position.
 - ⇒ If at the end of this OTI you have not achieved the results expected/required, it will be necessary to determine an appropriate remedial action to propose as mentioned above.
 - ⇒ If a definite decision cannot be made at the end of this OTI regarding your progress, the OTI may be extended. If this occurs, you will be notified in writing.
- ◆ Areas in which you think you need additional training will be considered. The scope and level of such training provided will be determined based on how much and what kind of training has already been provided and what is customary for your position duties and grade level. If you believe additional training is needed, submit a written request to me within ten (10) days listing specific training needs.
- ◆ Questions regarding this improvement plan, your work assignments, or the level of performance expected from you, should be directed to me.

Experience has indicated that, at times, performance problems can be the result of personal situations. While this may not be the case, it may be helpful to consider all the factors contributing to your performance problems. If this may be the case, we encourage you to contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at _____. You may contact the program personally, or if you prefer, an appointment can be made for you. All information you provide is strictly confidential, unless you specifically authorize its release.

Dates of Follow-up Discussions:

____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____ ____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____
____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____
Supvr. Init. _____ Supvr. Init. _____
____ Supvr. Init. _____

____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____ ____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____
____/____/____ Empl. Init. _____
Supvr. Init. _____ Supvr. Init. _____
____ Supvr. Init. _____

Final Review (to be done upon completion of the performance improvement period):

[] Employee has achieved the required improvement described in this OTI. OR

[] Employee has not achieved the required improvement described in this OTI. The employee continues to have problems in the areas described below:

Final Review Signatures:

Employee: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Supervisor/Rating Official: _____
Date: ____/____/____

Reviewing Official: _____
Date: ____/____/____

Distribution: Plan Establishment - Rating Official - Original, Employee - Copy, Reviewing Official - Copy, Human Resources - Copy
Plan Completion - Employee - Copy, Rating Official - Copy, Reviewing Official - Copy, Human Resources - Original

July 22, 1999

SUBJECT: Employee Recognition Program

TO: All Rural Development Employees

This memorandum transmits the new Employee Recognition policy for Rural Development employees including the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the Rural Housing Service, and the Rural Utilities Service. It is also intended to cover positions assigned to the new Support Services Bureau.

This policy became effective April 1, 1999, for non-bargaining unit employees. For bargaining unit employees, negotiations with the appropriate union local must be completed before this policy can be implemented.

Until further notification, approval to issue gift certificates and savings bonds to Federal employees and FSA non-Federal county employees is suspended (p. 4, p. 10, and p. 15). Approval will be given to issue gift certificates and savings bonds as soon as the USDA, National Finance Center considers the tax implications and updates the personnel payroll system to accommodate these types of awards. Servicing Human Resources offices will be notified when nature of action codes have been developed. Gift certificates may still be used to recognize accomplishments of private citizens (including volunteers, Conservation District employees, and other mission-related partners.)

This is the second Service Center Agencies common policy issuance. It is being issued in its present format pending implementation of a uniform directives system. This document is also available on the internet at <http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/hrd/cover.html>.

If you have questions related to this program, please contact your Servicing Human Resources Office.

(Signed by Leonard Hardy, Jr.)

LEONARD HARDY, JR.
Deputy Administrator
for Operations and Management

Attachment

EXPIRATION DATE:
Until Superseded

FILING INSTRUCTIONS
Administrative/Other Programs

**EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION
TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1 Purpose	1
2 Background	1
3 Legal Authorities That Govern Employee Recognition	1
4 Effective Date	2
5 Definitions	2
6 Acronyms and Abbreviations	2
7 Coverage	3
8 Responsibilities	3
9 Policy	4
a Overview	4
b Delegations of Authority for Employee Recognition	5
c Program Funding	5
d Recommendation and Approval of Recognition	5
e Documentation	7
f Team Recognition	8
g Recognition of Private Citizens	8
h Publicity	9
i Employee Recognition Committee	9
 <u>Exhibits</u>	
Exhibit 1 Recognition Categories	10
Exhibit 2 Employee Recognition Delegation Worksheet	15
Exhibit 3 SCA-4130, Employee Recognition Nomination and Approval	16
Exhibit 4 Justification Outline	17

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

1. PURPOSE

The Service Center Agency employee recognition program is designed to fairly and equitably recognize and reward individuals and groups for excellence in service. The program acknowledges contributions that lead to achievement of organizational, team, and individual results. Timely recognition provides a source of motivation for continued excellence.

2. BACKGROUND

Consistency is the basic principle of the employee recognition program. The issuance of awards at all organizational levels must be carried out with consistent application of the appropriate guidelines and policy. The following guiding principles promote an effective employee recognition program:

- Funding of the employee recognition program should be consistent among each of the Service Center Agencies.
- Issuance of employee recognition should be based on consistently applied guidelines.
- Approval authorities should be consistently delegated to the lowest practical levels.
- Outstanding accomplishments should be consistently recognized in a timely manner.
- Approved employee recognition should be consistently publicized to a wide audience.

This policy emphasizes immediate recognition of teams and individuals for noteworthy contributions and/or achievements.

3. LEGAL AUTHORITIES THAT GOVERN EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

- Chapter 45, Title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.) provides authority to establish an employee recognition program (5 U.S.C. 4503); and Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 451.
- The Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 (FEPCA), Public Law 101-509, provides Federal agencies authority to grant employees time-off from duty, without loss of pay or charge to leave, as employee recognition.
- Regulatory requirements for Quality Step Increases for General Schedule (GS) employees are found in 5 CFR Part 531.
- Regulatory requirements for Senior Executive Service Recognition are found in 5 U.S.C. 5384, 5 U.S.C. 4502 through 4503 and 5 U.S.C. 4507.

Distribution: All Employees

4. EFFECTIVE DATE

The effective date for this policy is April 1, 1999.

5. DEFINITIONS

- a Designated Approving Official - An individual that has been delegated the authority to review and approve recognition.
- b National Board of Directors - The Farm Service Agency's Administrator, Natural Resources Conservation Service's Chief, the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations and Management for Rural Development, and other officials as designated.
- c Nominating Official - Any Service Center Agency or Support Services Bureau employee.
- d Private Citizens - With the exception of FSA Non-Federal County Employees, any non-federal individual. Conservation District employees, volunteers, state agency employees, and other mission related partners are considered private citizens.
- e Rating Official - An employee's first line supervisor or other person designated with responsibility for issuing ratings of record.
- f Service Center Agencies - The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the mission areas of Rural Development.
- g State Board of Directors - The three Service Center Agency leaders in a state.
- h Support Services Bureau - The converged administrative staff for the Service Center Agencies.
- i Unique Program Entity Administrative Support Unit - Program offices, located outside the Washington DC area, i.e., Atlanta, Fort Worth, Kansas City, and St. Louis.

6. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- SCA - Service Center Agencies
- SSB - Support Services Bureau
- CFR. - Code of Federal Regulations
- U.S.C. - United States Code
- SES - Senior Executive Service

7. COVERAGE

This program covers all employees of the Service Center Agencies, including Farm Service Agency Non-Federal County employees and the employees in the Support Services Bureau.

Excluded from coverage are political appointees at the GS-13 level and above (e.g., Executive Schedule). Current Administration policy (as of January 1999) precludes Schedule "C" and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) employees from receiving cash awards.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES

a The Agency Heads are responsible for:

- (1) Ensuring that the program supports the Department's mission, goals, and objectives.
- (2) Ensuring equity in the distribution of recognition.
- (3) Ensuring that employees are informed of recognition policies and procedures.
- (4) Providing periodic training on the effective use of the recognition program.
- (5) Conducting annual reviews to ensure the effective use of the program.
- (6) Emphasizing the importance of teamwork through recognition of groups.
- (7) Incorporating funding for recognition into agency budget planning.
- (8) Ensuring that employee recognition is publicized.
- (9) Delegating recognition program authority and funding to the lowest level consistent with the Secretary's policies and guidelines.
- (10) Eliminating unnecessary levels of review to ensure timely processing of recognition.
- (11) Encouraging innovative recognition at the local level.

b The Servicing Human Resources Office is responsible for:

- (1) Providing technical and operational support and advice.
- (2) Ensuring the employee recognition program is administered in a manner consistent with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.
- (3) Processing personnel actions related to recognition.
- (4) Ensuring that employee recognition records are maintained in the Servicing Human Resources Office in accordance with requirements in 5 CFR Parts 430 and 432.
- (5) Providing training on the employee recognition program.

c Supervisors and Managers are responsible for:

- (1) Recognizing employees for specific achievements.
- (2) Ensuring equity in the distribution of recognition.
- (3) Considering input as appropriate from co-workers, customers, or other sources such as unions and employee organizations when making recognition decisions.
- (4) Recognizing contributions in a timely manner.
- (5) Emphasizing the importance of teamwork through recognition of groups.
- (6) Promoting the recognition program by encouraging employee participation, arranging for appropriate presentation, and publicizing recognition.
- (7) Allowing those recognized to choose the type of recognition, when appropriate.
- (8) Reviewing nominations to ensure that recognition is linked to the contribution and the amount accurately reflects the value of the contribution rather than grade level or other non-merit factors.

d Designated Approving Officials are responsible for:

- (1) Providing support to employees, supervisors, and managers.
- (2) Reviewing employee-initiated awards for compliance to stated criteria and certifying funds availability.

e Nominating Officials are responsible for:

- (1) Actively seeking out exceptional achievements worthy of recognition.
- (2) Developing employee recognition nominations in a nondiscriminatory manner.
- (3) Accurately documenting the exceptional achievements of others and ensuring the appropriate guidelines are applied to all nominations.

9. POLICY

a Overview

There are many different types of employee recognition available. Recognition may be given for a specific outstanding accomplishment such as a superior contribution on a short-term assignment or project, an act of heroism, scientific achievement, major discovery or significant cost savings. The following types of recognition are covered by this policy:

- Cash
- Certificates - Merit & Appreciation
- Gift Certificates
- Keepsake Items
- Letters of Commendation
- Quality Step Increase
- Thank You Cards & Letters
- Time Off
- U.S. Savings Bonds
- Length of Service
- Agency Honorary Awards
- Department Honor Awards
- Federal Honor Awards
- External Awards

Exhibit 1 describes each of the recognition categories in detail.

b Delegation of Authority for Employee Recognition

- (1) Exhibit 2, Employee Recognition Delegation Worksheet, describes the employee recognition approval limitations, as authorized by USDA. The National, State, and ASU Boards of Directors and equivalent positions are required to jointly discuss and, whenever possible, establish appropriate, consistent delegations of authority for their service area.
- (2) Further limitation of authority for employee recognition approval is within the area of responsibility of the National, State and ASU Boards of Directors and equivalent positions. Delegating authority and responsibility to the lowest level is encouraged. Exhibit 2, Employee Recognition Delegation Worksheet, should be used in assigning delegations of authority within the appropriate area of responsibility.

c Program Funding

The National and State Boards of Directors and equivalent positions are required to jointly discuss and, whenever possible, establish appropriate, consistent awards budgets within delegated budgetary authority. Consistency of funding levels among the Service Center Agencies will promote equity and teamwork between employees.

d Recommendation and Approval of Recognition

- (1) All Service Center Agency employees should be considered for recognition based on work accomplishments, without regard to grade level, or other non-merit factors. Review and approval requirements are determined by the National and State Boards of Directors and equivalent positions, as documented in the local Employee Recognition Delegation Worksheet (Exhibit 2).

Designated approving officials are responsible for ensuring funding is available.

- (2) Except for Quality Step Increases (QSI's), employees may develop award nominations involving co-workers or employees from any of the Service Center Agencies, including the Support Services Bureau. Subordinates cannot approve an award for their immediate supervisor or higher level official.
- (3) When recognition is nominated from outside an Agency, the approving official must be from the Agency benefiting from the service. The approving Agency is responsible for funding the recognition.

For example:

- (a) If an NRCS employee nominates an FSA employee for work that benefited NRCS, the approving official must be from NRCS and NRCS is responsible for funding the award.
- (b) If a Rural Development employee nominates a team that consisted of employees from Rural Development, FSA, and NRCS for work that benefited all three agencies, approval must be obtained from each of the agencies. Funding of the award would be shared by all three agencies.
- (c) If an FSA employee nominates a Rural Development employee for work that benefited only Rural Development, the FSA employee would need to work with approving officials within Rural Development to obtain funding and approval.
- (4) In determining appropriate levels of recognition, nominators should determine if the contribution can be measured in terms of time saved, money saved or expenditures avoided. The measurable benefits scale will help nominators determine the appropriate level of recognition. If the contribution cannot be precisely measured, the Nonmeasurable Benefits Scale criteria should be applied.

Measurable Benefits Scale

Savings to Government	Award Amount
Up to \$10,000	10 percent of the benefits
\$10,001 - \$100,000	\$1,000 for the first \$10,000 in benefits, plus 3 percent of benefits over \$10,000
\$100,001 or more	\$3,700 for the first \$100,000 in benefits plus .005 of benefits over \$100,000. Award amount should not exceed recipient's annual salary

Nonmeasurable Benefits Scale

Contribution Level	Definition	Amounts
Moderate	Moderate change or modification of operating procedures meeting minimum standard for cash award, simple modification of methods, or limited service to the public, which affect the functions, mission, or employees of a specific work unit (e.g., easing a backlog or completing a project of short duration).	Certificate, or \leq \$500, or 1 to 24 hours of time off.
Substantial	Substantial change or modification of an operating procedure. An important improvement to value of a product, activity, program, or service to the public, which affect an entire state, or several divisions, offices, or counties.	\$501 - \$2,500, or 25 to 40 hours of time off
High	Major improvement, usually affecting major problems; major changes in methods, or procedures, which affect numerous states, regions, or divisions.	\$2,501 - \$5,500
Exceptional	Initiation of a new principle or major program. Superior improvement to the quality of a critical activity, program, or service to the public, which affect more than one agency, is Department-wide, or is in the public interest throughout the United States.	\$5,501 - \$10,000

- (5) Rating officials are the only persons authorized to nominate their employees for QSI's. Approval must be obtained as defined in Exhibit 2.
- (6) Employees may be allowed to choose the type of recognition they receive.

e Documentation

- (1) Nomination and approval of recognition may be documented on form SCA-4130, "USDA Service Center Employee Recognition Nomination and Approval" (Exhibit 3) or on form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Awards. Documentation may also be in the form of a letter or a memo containing all the necessary criteria outlined on Form SCA-4130.

- (2) When the value of the recognition is \$500 or less, or time off is 10 hours or less, only a brief description of the accomplishment is necessary.
- (3) For recognition greater than \$500, or time off greater than 10 hours, a written justification is required. Exhibit 4 outlines helpful hints for preparing a justification.
- (4) Nominating and approving officials are responsible for ensuring that dual recognition for the same accomplishment does not occur. However, the combination of two forms of recognition (e.g., a plaque may be given in conjunction with cash) cannot exceed the total value of the approved award.

f Team Recognition

- (1) Employees working as a team may be recognized when team contributions and results exceed expectations. In addition to the guidelines and delegations of authority, the following guidelines apply to teams:
 - (a) Team recognition may be issued only when a strong interdependence exists among team member tasks and team outcomes.
 - (b) Clear goals for the team were established in advance of team performance and evaluation of accomplishments.
 - (c) Team recognition should be distributed to individual team members equitably (i.e., based on individual performance within the team) rather than equally (i.e., all team members receive equal amounts).
- (2) Teams of interagency employees may be nominated for recognition. Nominations requiring a higher level approval must be jointly reviewed and approved by appropriate personnel from each agency involved. Team members that are private citizens may be included in the team recognition; however, they may only receive keepsakes, letters of commendation, certificates of appreciation, certificates of merit, or thank you letters/cards.

g Recognition of Private Citizens

- (1) Private citizens who contribute to the mission of the Service Center Agency or USDA's mission as a whole may receive recognition for those efforts. Conservation District employees, volunteers, state agency employees, and other mission-related partners are eligible on the same basis as other private citizens.
- (2) Private citizens (including volunteers, Conservation District employees, etc.) may receive thank you letters/notes, letters of commendation, certificates of appreciation, certificates of merit, gift certificates, or keepsakes. They are not eligible to receive other types of recognition.

h Publicity

- (1) Publicizing exceptional accomplishments establishes performance benchmarks for the workforce and promotes accountability in the utilization of agency resources.
- (2) Public recognition and communication of exceptional contributions is encouraged. The announcement should describe the accomplishment and the recognition issued.
- (3) Local newspapers and similar sources may be contacted when recognition warrants this level of publicity.

i Employee Recognition Committee

- (1) The National and State Boards of Directors and equivalent positions may consider establishing an Employee Recognition Committee. Membership of this committee should include a diverse cross-section of employees, Associations, and Union representation in locations with Bargaining Units.
- (2) Following are examples of the roles of the Committee:
 - (a) Ensuring consistency in funding of the employee recognition program among each of the Service Center Agencies.
 - (b) Ensuring that employee recognition is based on consistently applied guidelines.
 - (c) Ensuring nondiscriminatory employee recognition distribution.
 - (d) Ensuring recognition is issued in a timely manner.

- (3) The committee should not be used for routine approval of individual or team award nominations. However, to support employee involvement in the employee recognition decision process, the Committee may be used as a source of input for high-level or large dollar value nominations.

RECOGNITION CATEGORIES

Exhibit 1

a Cash

- (1) All Federal employees and Farm Service Agency Non-Federal County Employees are eligible to receive cash awards.
- (2) Cash awards may range from \$50 to \$10,000, depending on the contribution level. Awards may not exceed 10% of an employee's annual salary.

Cash awards less than or equal to \$500 will be issued immediately and taxes will be added to the award amount. When an employee reaches the threshold of \$501 during the preceding twelve (12) months, taxes cannot be added to the award. The award must be processed through the NFC system for payment and taxes must be deducted from the award.

b Certificates, Letters of Commendation, and Thank You Notes

- (1) All Federal employees and nonfederal individuals and organizations are eligible to receive certificates of appreciation, certificates of merit, letters of commendation, and thank you notes.
- (2) All employees are encouraged to write letters of thanks, appreciation, and commendation for individuals when they believe a contribution to be noteworthy. When a contribution warrants additional recognition, a letter of commendation from a higher organizational level may be requested.

c Gift Certificates

- (1) All Service Center Agency employees and private citizens (including volunteers and other mission-related partners) are eligible to receive gift certificates. Gift Certificates may not exceed \$100.
- (2) Gift certificates are items that can be redeemed for merchandise or services at a particular place of business, a group of businesses, or a retail location (this includes chain stores, restaurants, and shopping centers).
- (3) The Internal Revenue Service considers gift certificates to be taxable fringe benefits that must be taxed on the fair market value. The face value of the gift certificate is the fair market value. At the time the personnel action recording the recognition is processed, the amount will be adjusted to include the taxes due. The total of the gift certificate plus taxes will be reflected on the employee's Leave and Earning Statement.
- (4) A gift certificate cannot be converted to a cash payment.

d Keepsakes

- (1) All Service Center Agency employees are eligible to receive keepsakes. Private citizens who contribute to the mission of USDA or the Federal government as a whole may also receive keepsakes. Non-Federal County office employees, Conservation District employees, state agencies, and other mission-related partners are eligible on the same basis as other private citizens. When appropriate, concurrence from the non-Federal employer should be gained prior to issuing recognition.

For recognition of Volunteers, refer to respective Agency guidelines for additional direction.

- (2) Keepsake items emphasize symbolic recognition of significant contributions and public recognition. Items presented as honorary awards must meet all the following criteria:
- Be something that the recipient could reasonably be expected to value, but not something that conveys a sense of monetary value;
 - Have a lasting trophy value;
 - Symbolize the Agency - recipient relationship in some fashion;
 - Take an appropriate form to be purchased with public funds and be used in the public sector.
- (3) Keepsakes can include such items as paperweights, key chains, clocks, plaques, jackets, T-shirts, coffee mugs, pen and pencil sets, etc. Presenters of awards should be particularly sensitive to public perceptions that could arise from granting expensive, keepsake items. Offices are cautioned not to give "personal gifts" to employees. Keepsake awards should normally meet the following criteria:
- be of an honorary nature;
 - be able to be worn, displayed, or used in the recipient's work environment; and
 - at a minimum, include the Department seal or logo. The Department name, or logo, should be clearly visible on the keepsake and must be permanently affixed. A peel-off sticker is not adequate.
- (4) No more than \$250 may be spent on any one item. The cost of customizing the item must be included in the total cost.

e Quality Step Increases

- (1) Service Center Agency employees, except wage grade employees, may receive one Quality Step Increase (QSI) in a 52-week period.
- (2) A QSI is an additional within-grade increase which may be granted for sustained, high quality performance significantly above that expected at the "results achieved" level. It must be supported by a "results achieved" rating. The supervisor must provide documentation that specifically describes:
 - the actual results(s) achieved and their linkage to established targets;
 - how the employee substantially exceeded the performance standards and expected work results communicated to the employee by the supervisor; and
 - how the employee's performance has been sustained at such a high level throughout the performance appraisal period.
- (3) Quality increases are not appropriate when it is known an employee is in step 10 of the pay range or when it is known that the employee is about to receive a promotion or vacate a position within 60 days. A QSI may be appropriate if the employee is moving to a similar position at the same grade level and performance is expected to continue at the same level of effectiveness.
- (4) Since quality increases are in addition to within grade increases, an employee who receives a quality increase does not start a new waiting period to meet the time requirements for a regular within grade increase. The time the employee served in the previous pay step (before the quality increase was effective) will count toward the total waiting period for the next within grade increase.

When the QSI places the employee into a step at which the waiting period becomes longer (e.g., at step 4 the waiting period becomes 104 weeks, and at step 7 the waiting period becomes 156 weeks), the waiting period for the next within-grade increase is extended by 52 weeks; however, the employee receives the benefit of the quality increase during this period.

f Time Off Awards

- (1) All Service Center Agency employees are eligible for time off awards.
- (2) A full-time employee may be granted up to 80 hours of time off during a leave year. A part-time employee or an employee with an uncommon tour of duty may be granted up to the average number of hours worked in a pay period or the employee's scheduled tour of duty. Awards are in full-hour increments.

The amount of time off that can be granted for a single contribution is one-half the maximum that may be granted during the leave year.

- (3) A time off award must be scheduled and used within 1 year after the effective date of the award; any unused time off is forfeited. The award is effective the first full pay period following approval. Before using any time off, the supervisor must concur with the requested dates.
- (4) A time off award will not convert to a cash payment under any circumstances.

g U.S. Savings Bonds

- (1) All Service Center Agency employees are eligible to receive Savings Bonds.
- (2) U.S. Savings Bonds must be purchased in the employee's name.
- (3) The amount of the award should be equal to the purchase price of the bond.
- (4) The Internal Revenue Service considers U.S. Savings bonds to be taxable fringe benefits that must be taxed on their fair market value. The fair market value of a savings bond generally is the purchase price of the bond. For example, if a \$200 bond is purchased for \$100, tax withholding must be based on \$100. At the time the personnel action recording the recognition is processed, the amount will be adjusted to include the taxes due. The total of the fair market value plus taxes will be reflected on the employee's Leave and Earning Statement.

h Length of Service Awards

Length of Service Awards are given to recognize an employee's federal and FSA County service. Employees should be recognized at 5 years of service and each 5-year increment thereafter. In computing eligibility, employees shall receive credit for total federal and FSA County service, including civilian and all honorable military service. Recognition should be timely, as close to the anniversary date as possible. Keepsakes may also accompany Length of Service certificates. Keepsakes should be appropriate, of nominal value (not exceeding \$100) and be commensurate with the length of service.

i Agency Honorary Awards

Each agency may establish honor awards and criteria as appropriate.

j Department Honor Awards

Departmental Honor Awards provide recognition to employees of the Department and our partners. Honor awards are the most prestigious recognition that can be granted by the Department for career accomplishments, exceptional support of the departmental mission, or for heroism.

k Other Federal and External Honor Awards

These awards are sponsored by other federal agencies or organizations or are co-sponsored with the Department. These awards may include, but are not limited to, the GEICO Public Service Award, the Roger W. Jones Award, the William T. Pecora Award, and the WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) Award. The Department will disseminate award criteria including the sponsor, the due dates, and other pertinent information, through Agency Human Resources Management Divisions, when awards are announced.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION DELEGATION WORKSHEET

Exhibit 2

This chart describes approval limitations as authorized by USDA and provides a worksheet to define the delegations within their area of responsibility. Delegations for each area of responsibilities must be defined.

RECOGNITION CATEGORY	MAXIMUM AUTHORITY ALLOWED BY USDA POLICY	Approval with No higher level review required.	Approval with One Higher Level Review (Manager, Supervisor or Equivalent)
Example: Cash		Title* Value All emp ≤\$100 DC, CED, ≤\$500 CDM, & above	Title* Value All emp \$101 - 500 CED, DC, CDM \$501-999 AC, RDM, DD \$501-2,000 State Ldr < \$10,000
Cash Up to \$500	Nomination and approval by all employees (no higher level review is required)	Title* Value	Title* Value
\$501 to \$10,000	Approval with one higher level of review		
Quality Step Increase	Rating officials nominate; one higher level of review is required		
Thank-you Card or Letter & Certificates	Nomination and approval by all employees (no higher level review required)		
Savings Bonds Up to \$250 Purchase Price	Nomination and approval by all employees (no higher level review required)		
Keepsake Items Up to \$250	Nomination and approval by all employees (no higher level review required)		
Gift Certificates Up to \$100	Nomination and approval by all employees (no higher level review required)		

Time-Off			
Up to 10	Nomination and approval by a		
Hours	manager or supervisor (no		
	higher level review		
	required)**		
11-40 hours	Approval with one higher		
	level of review**		

*At a minimum designated approving officials must be identified by title. Approval indicates funding is available.

** Further limitations apply to part-time and intermittent employees.

Effective: _____Area of Coverage:_____

AuthorizedOfficial:_____

USDA Service Center

Exhibit 3

Employee Recognition Nomination and Approval

Recipient's Name:		Social Security Number:	
Title, Series and Grade:		Duty Station:	
Employer (specify agency):			
Recipient's Contribution:		Time Period of Contribution: _____ to _____	
Award Type: Cash: \$_____.00 Gift Certificate: \$_____.00 Keepsake: (Description of recognition item): _____ _____ QSI: _____ New Grade and Step: ____/____ Time Off: _____ hours U. S. Savings Bond: \$_____.00 Funding Code: _____		Human Resources Use Only NOA: _____ Auth: _____ Eff Date: _____ Recognition during previous 12 months:	
Nominating Employee: (Name) Signature: _____ Date: _____			
If Required, Reviewing Official: (Name) Signature: _____ Date: _____			
Approving Official: (Name) Signature: _____		Approved: () Yes () No Date: _____	

Filing Instructions: Cash, QSI, Time-off, Savings Bonds, Gift
Certificates - Employee Performance File and Official Personnel Folder
(optional, left hand side); Keepsakes - Attach to procurement and/or
payment document.

SCA-4130

JUSTIFICATION OUTLINE

Exhibit 4

Following is a step-by-step outline that describes the sections and verbiage to justify an award.

- I. During the period of (give time of performance), (give name of individual or group), (give explanation of accomplishment).
- II. This exceeded expectations as identified in the current position description by:
 - a Improving quality.
 - b Timely completion of the project.
 - c Increasing productivity.
 - d Overcoming adverse obstacles or working under unusual circumstances.
 - e Using unusual creativity.
 - f Saving the Government time and/or money.
 - g Increasing program effectiveness.
- III. As a result:
 - a Project acceptance.
 - b Savings in time, money, and/or material.
 - c More efficiency.
 - d Effectiveness.
 - e Technological advancement.
 - f Productivity increase.
 - g Improved levels of cooperation that will result in . . .
- IV. Therefore, we propose an award of (amount/hours).